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# GUIDE

TO THE

## STUDY OF MORAL EVIDENCE,

OR OF THAT

*Species of Reasoning,*

WHICH RELATES TO

MATTERS OF FACT AND PRACTICE.

BY

REV. JAMES EDWARD GAMBIER, ENG.

WITH

*ILLUSTRATIVE NOTES,*

BEING AN

APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF THE SCIENCE

TO THE

*Divine Origin of the Christian Religion.*

BY JOSEPH A. WARNE, A. M.

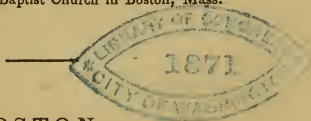
Pastor of the Baptist Church in Brookline, Massachusetts.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY ON MORAL REASONING,

BY WILLIAM HAGUE, A. M.

Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Boston, Mass.



BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY JAMES LORING.

1834.

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY  
ON  
MORAL REASONING.

BY WILLIAM HAGUE, A. M.

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THE reasoning power, is one which gives to man a high pre-eminence in the scale of being. It is this which constitutes him the 'prince of creatures;' the lord of this lower world.

'All else is prone, *irrational*, and mute,  
And unaccountable, by instinct led;  
But man was made of angel form, erect,—  
With reason high to balance right and wrong,'

to judge of what is true and what is false, and to make new discoveries in nature and in morals.

It is true, we have heard it questioned, whether brutes have not in some instances developed the faculty of reason. We have from our infancy been familiar with stories respecting the sagacity of the horse and the elephant, which have led us to doubt whether the opinion that brutes were governed only by instinct were founded in fact; and whether the difference between the human and the

brute creation, does not consist in the *degree* of mental power, rather than in the *nature* of their faculties. As says an old poet,

‘ Tell me why the ant,  
Midst summer’s plenty, thinks of winter’s want ?  
By constant journies careful to prepare  
Her stores, and bring home the corny ear ;  
By what instruction does she bite the grain,  
Lest hid in earth, and taking root again,  
It might elude the foresight of her care? —

Evil like us they shun, and covet good,  
Abhor the poison, and receive the food ;  
Like us they love or hate, like us they know  
To joy the friend, or grapple with the foe.  
With seeming thought their action they intend,  
And use the means proportion’d to the end.  
Then vainly the philosopher avers,  
That reason guides our deeds and instinct theirs.  
How can we justly different causes frame,  
Where the effects, entirely, are the same ?  
Instinct and reason, how can we divide ?  
’Tis the fool’s ignorance, and the pedant’s pride.’

Although we were to admit that the poet was right in this assertion, still we might with success insist on the distinction between the human and the brute creation, as to the nature of their faculties, particularly in regard to conscience, the power of abstraction, and the feeling of the mysterious.

But a strict analysis of the operations of instinct and reason, may lead us to believe that Prior, whose words we have quoted, rashly leaped to his conclusion that they ‘ entirely are the same.’ Instinct denotes the

natural, uniform tendency of a voluntary agent, to do any thing without previous deliberation. The efforts of the new-born infant to procure its food are instinctive. Such too, are its attempts to facilitate the operation of cutting teeth, by pressing a hard substance against the gum. It knows nothing about the nature of teeth, or the mode of quickening their growth; but acts from impulse, without the contemplation of motives. Reason, however, is that power by which the mind compares known truths, so as to ascertain their relations, and reach those which were unknown. Thus, men saw the paper-shelled nautilus spreading its thin membrane to the breeze, and by the impulse of wind and the force of its arms, moving on the surface of the water; and when a storm arose, they saw it contract its membrane, fill its shell with water, and sink to the bottom. Hence reason inferred that a vessel, of less specific gravity than water, might by means of an expanded sheet, be made to move upon the surface of the ocean. After the first rude attempts were made, new ideas were obtained and compared, new principles developed, and so the art of navigation reached a lofty pitch of perfection. Reason could thus take a hint from instinct, and by its power of progressive improvement, reach some distant and unseen result. Man could thus become with profit the disciple of nature,

His arts of building from the bee receive,  
Learn of the mole to plough, the worm to weave,  
Learn of the little nautilus to sail,  
Spread the thin oar, and catch the driving gale.

But instinct can never be improved. It is only adapted to the present exigencies of the creatures which act from its impulse. The present race of Nautili know no more of navigation than did the first parents of the species. So too, the present generation of bees and beavers, know no more about architecture than the first of their several races knew; and unless their nature change, not one of their species ever will know more.

Here, then, is a strongly marked distinction between Instinct and Reason. The first is not susceptible of improvement, while the latter is infinitely progressive. From the most simple principles, she ascends step by step to the most splendid results, till she herself stands amazed at the extent and grandeur of her discoveries. From observing the fall of an apple, Sir Isaac Newton derived the law of gravitation, which extends from this to distant worlds. To the progress of reason, we can set no limits. Naught but eternity and an unbounded universe furnish full scope for her exercise.

Again, instinct needs no training, while reason is scarcely developed without cultivation. The bird that has been nurtured in a cage,

and then permitted to fly forth, will construct its nest with an accuracy which human art cannot imitate ;—just as if it had been reared under the tuition of its mother. But a man who had spent his early years in seclusion from society, would know nothing of the mode of providing for his own comfort. Thus Pope very justly asks,

Say, where full instinct is the unerring guide,  
What Pope or Council can they need beside ?  
Reason however able, cool at best,  
Cares not for service or but serves when prest ;  
Stays till we call, and then not often near,  
But honest instinct comes, a volunteer ;  
Sure ne'er to overshoot, but just to hit,  
While still too wide or short is human wit.

This leads us to observe that instinct differs from reason in the *superior accuracy of its results*. An architect may err in adjusting the form and size of a building ; but the bee forms her cell with wondrous skill and unerring precision. McLaurin, a celebrated mathematician, calculated the exact angle at which the three planes which form the basis of the cell of a honey-comb must meet, in order to possess the greatest degree of strength, and make the best economy of labor and material. This problem he solved by a process in fluxions ; and when he came to measure the angle, found it to accord with his calculation most minutely. Now if this be the result of reason in the bee, then she possesses



it in a greater degree than the majority of the human family. If it be instinct, then in her operations, we must admire the handy-work of the Deity,

'For, reason raise o'er instinct as we can,  
In this 'tis God that works, in that 'tis man.'

Reasoning consists in a comparison of propositions. Commencing with those which we see to be true by intuition, that is, those which our constitution compels us to take for granted, we compare them with others which are related to them and those again with others, till we arrive at results which we could not have reached, without the intervention of these intermediate ideas. It is thus in both of the great departments of reasoning, the moral and the demonstrative. The demonstrative is that which respects only abstract subjects, and their necessary relations, such as the properties of numbers, of mathematical figures, extension, duration, weight, velocity and force. It is particularly valuable to every man, from its tendency to strengthen the mind, to impart to it habits of accurate discrimination, to inspire it with a love for truth, and thus to prepare it for successful operation in the great business of moral reasoning.

To this latter department, belong the subjects on which we are daily called to employ our thoughts; the various relations, the duties



and the rights of men, the important themes furnished by history, the constitution of society, politics, law, theology, political economy, and all that may be denominated matters of fact. Obviously, therefore, every man is obliged every day to carry forward in his mind processes of moral reasoning: and on the mode in which he habitually does it, will depend, in a great degree, his course of conduct, the complexion of his opinions, and the tone of his character.

While it must be admitted that an attention to mathematics greatly assists the mind in the conduct of moral reasoning, yet it is true that an exclusive attention to the former, unfits a man for the latter. The influence of mathematical studies on the habits of the mind has been often undervalued, and doubtless it has been sometimes overrated. There have been known men, who have devoted almost all their time and energy to mathematical pursuits, men who could hold distinctly before their minds the long details of a difficult demonstration, and commencing with axioms, go from step to step to some remote result with most marvellous precision, who in the ordinary affairs of life evinced a lack of common sense, which would have discredited an untutored peasant. The entire devotion of the mind to demonstrative reasoning, seems to be as effectual in debilitating the judgment as the taste;

and the effect which it has upon the latter, may be learned from the well-known story of the mathematician, who, having read Milton's *Paradise Lost*, sagely asked in the tone of an objector, what the poem had proved !

The reason of this influence is obvious from the nature of the case. In demonstrative reasoning, a man becomes possessed of the most absolute certainty ; but in moral reasoning, he can reach only what is called moral certainty, or a commanding probability. Thus, in reasoning on the question whether the square of the hypotenuse of a right angled triangle, is equal to the sum of the squares of the two sides, as he compares one idea with another, he sees the truth at every step by intuition ; and when he reaches the result, he knows that it cannot possibly be otherwise ; that the opposite position would be absurd. But in reasoning on such questions as these, 'is the practice of war right or wrong ?' 'is a national tariff beneficial or injurious ?' 'is the conduct of the United States towards the Indians just or unjust ?' much would depend on a man's early association of ideas, the state of his moral feelings, the degree in which his interests might be affected by the result of the inquiry ; and even when he had reached a correct decision, he could not say that the opposite were philosophically absurd, but only that the weight of evidence was on the other

side. In order, therefore, to be a skilful moral reasoner, it is necessary that the judgment be trained to accuracy, in estimating the relative worth of different kinds of evidence ; to discern amidst intricate and distracting inquiries, where the commanding probability appears, and to submit to it as readily as to mathematical certainty.

From this view of the subject, it is obvious that in many instances, a man's opinions on moral subjects may be regarded as sure tests of his character. The reason is, that such opinions are greatly modified by the state of the moral feelings. This is a fact too often overlooked ; and thence, men have been led to plead for the innocence of error. 'To affect belief,' says one, 'you must affect the subject of it, by producing new arguments or considerations. The understanding being passive, as to the impressions made upon it, if you wish to change those impressions, you must change the cause which produces them. You can alter perceptions only by altering the thing perceived. Every man's consciousness will tell him, that the will can no more modify the effect of an argument upon the understanding than it can change the taste of sugar to the palate, or the fragrance of a rose to the smell ; and that nothing can weaken its force as apprehended by the intellect, but another argument opposed to it.' Now all this is un-

doubtedly true within the sphere of demonstrative reasoning. There the evidence is of such a nature, as to sway alike all minds which contemplate it, whether rude or refined, whether vicious or virtuous. There, pride and prejudice, and passion and selfishness, are of no avail. But within the sphere of moral reasoning, these elements work wonders, in giving to opinions their colour and complexion. Suppose for instance, that you would fain persuade a man who is making a fortune by the traffic in ardent spirit, to abandon his pursuit, and take a decided stand under the banner of the Temperance Reform. You present before him, perhaps, a cloud of witnesses composed of the most reputable physicians in the world, all attesting that alcohol is a poison, and that any quantity taken by a man in health, does him injury rather than good ; you prove from official documents, that it is the cause of three fourths of the pauperism and crime that exist in the land, that it is the most powerful of all temptations in leading youth astray from the path of virtue, that it is the great bane of domestic happiness ; and you urge him by all that is endearing in his relation to his family, to his country, and to society around him, by all that is affecting in the tears and groans and woes of the more than widowed mother weeping over her helpless children, of the fond sister lamenting the ruin of a once lovely brother,

and of the yet youthful wife mourning over the wreck of her most sacred hopes, you urge him by all that is ennobling in philanthropy, and all that is imperious in moral obligation, to forsake at once and forever, a business so fraught with death and destruction. The argument is to you most convincing; and so it seems to every unbiassed mind. Yes, to such it is not merely convincing; it sheds a blaze of light, intense and overpowering. But this man perchance will calmly reply, that he is not convinced; that you have a right to your opinion; but for his own part, he believes that 'a little will do a man good,' that he means to use it moderately himself as long as he lives, and to manufacture it as a proper article of trade. Now why is not this man convinced? Is there any want of light, any defect of evidence? Must a new array of arguments be brought forward to sustain your position? No. Change now, the man's circumstances. Suppose that instead of acquiring wealth by the traffic in alcohol, he were sure of making a fortune by an alliance with the cause of Temperance. Then the first argument you presented would be sufficient to convince him. Then, not only would his opinion accord with yours, but he would probably express his wonder that any man of sane mind and common humanity could come to a different conclusion.

From the very nature of moral reasoning,



therefore, it is well adapted to man's present condition as a state of probation. It does furnish a test of character. The light which irradiates the path of duty, may seem to the man of honest heart as clear as that of the unclouded sun, while to the man of another spirit, it may appear as dim and feeble as 'the pale moon-beam's sickly ray.' \*

The modes of moral reasoning are three ; analogy, induction, deduction.

I. ANALOGY. By this is meant a similitude in the relations of things. It supposes a harmonious uniformity in the laws of nature, which we are all led to admit, not so much from deliberately weighing the results of past experience, as from the dictates of our mental constitution. We all believe that the sun will rise to-morrow, not so much from estimating the worth of our experience on the subject, or the testimony of history that it always was so, as from the natural tendency of our minds to confide in the constancy of nature. We are conscious of just such a tendency to trust in reasoning from analogy, which supposes that any general principle which pervades one part of the natural or moral universe, which

\* The cause of the difficulty lies not in the things, but in ourselves. For as the eyes of bats to day-light, so is the human mind to objects which are in their own nature the clearest of all.—*Arist. Metaph. lib. 2, cap 1.*

falls within the sphere of our observation, pervades also those parts which are beyond that sphere, where the circumstances are similar. Thus, as we look over the earth, we perceive a most wise and beneficent adaptation of the laws of nature to promote the happiness of animated beings like ourselves. Then, as we look up to the heavens, and contemplate the planets Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, we are struck with the view of just such an adaptation there. Like the earth, they revolve around the sun, and receive their light from him ; like the earth, several of them are known to turn around their axis, and thence have the alternations of day and night ; like the earth, they receive lunar light in the absence of the solar, and all are subject to the same law of gravitation. Thence to a mind conversant with the laws of the universe, the inference is natural and almost resistless, that they are the abodes of rational beings.

We reason analogically, from the natural to the moral world thus. When we see that the Author of the universe acts upon a general principle in the natural world, we take it for granted that he acts upon the same principle in the moral world, where the nature of the case will admit its application. For instance, we see in the natural world, an adaptation of means to ends, and an inseparable connexion established between them, so that if a man

would gain any physical blessing, such as health, strength or wealth, he must use the appointed means; exercise and temperance, industry and economy. So in the intellectual and moral world, if a man would advance in knowledge and virtue, and enjoy peace of mind, he must use the appropriate means; decision of purpose, persevering effort, self-denial, the discipline of the passions, and obedience to the dictates of conscience.

So fitted is the human mind to be swayed by analogical reasoning, that often it will be effectual, where every other kind of argument will fail. Especially, is this the case, among the less informed classes of society. Suppose that in travelling through some of the ruder parts of our country, you should find an honest yeoman, prejudiced against the education of children; saying that they would become better men and citizens, if they were permitted to grow up under the simple tuition of nature and common sense, than they would if their characters were moulded by any of your artificial systems of education now in vogue: if you should endeavour to convince him of his error by explaining the nature of education, and the various benefits which it is thence adapted to impart, you would probably not succeed. But if you should point him to his corn-field, his orchard, or his garden, and ask him whether he could derive any fruit from



them without cultivation, whether, if left to itself, the soil would not be overrun with weeds and briars, he would doubtless give you a correct answer. Then reply, if such be the law of nature, is it possible that the human mind can yield its riches, and present to view such a scene of beauty and order as it is capable of exhibiting without cultivation and without care? And he would probably acknowledge by words or by silence, the force of your appeal.

Hence, we can easily perceive, how well adapted were the instructions of our Saviour to the wants of the common people. For these, he felt a special care. These 'heard him gladly.' To these he chiefly addressed himself, not merely in apothegms and precepts, but also in parables, which were marked by the most beautiful simplicity, and which derived much of their force from the analogy between the material and the spiritual world.

The object of analogical reasoning is twofold; 1st. to lead the way in the discovery of new truths; 2d. to establish those already known.

The principle on which it leads to the discovery of truth we have already stated; namely, that the Author of the universe governs it by general laws, so that if we discover a law which governs one part of the universe, we may suppose it to exist every where in like circumstances. Analogy thus becomes the

pioneer of science. We see this illustrated in the train of thought, which led the mind of Sir Isaac Newton to one of the grandest results it ever reached. 'As he sat alone in his garden, he fell into a speculation on the power of gravity; that as this power sensibly diminished, at the remotest distances from the centre of the earth, to which we can rise, it appeared to him that this power must extend much further than is usually thought. Why not as high as the moon, said he to himself: and if so, her motion must be influenced by it; perhaps she is retained in her orbit thereby; and if the moon be retained in her orbit by the force of gravity, no doubt the primary planets are carried round the sun by the like power.\*' Thus was he enabled, by the aid of a far-reaching analogy, to strike out a brilliant path of discovery, and to give to the world an interpretation of nature's laws so lucid and so wonderful, that it seemed almost like a revelation from heaven.

Not only is analogical reasoning, a guide to the discovery of physical, but also of moral truths. This it was which led Socrates and his disciples to confide so strongly in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. They saw that every object in the world around them

\* Dr. Pemberton's preface to the account of Sir Isaac Newton's discoveries; as quoted in Dr. Wayland's discourse on the Philosophy of Analogy.

was made perfect in its nature ; every blade of grass,

‘ And herb and flower,  
With numerous beasts of every kind, and fowl  
Of every wing, and every tuneful note,  
And all the fish that in the multitude  
Of waters swam,’

the whole animate creation seemed to have upon it the impress of perfection, and to attain in its present state of existence the end for which it had been formed. But man, endowed with far nobler powers than any of God’s creatures on the earth, capable of boundless progression in knowledge and moral excellence, during his present state of being just begins to expand. His soul develops itself just enough to give some faint idea of its vast capacities, and then it is summoned away from this theatre of action. It does not come nigh the high and glorious end, for which from its nature it seems to have been designed. Now it would be against all analogy to suppose that the Creator hath made man so much in vain as he must have done if there be no future state, where the faculties of the human spirit can be developed to their full extent. ‘ Made in the divine image, man must be immortal, or else, the noblest of all the Creator’s works must be more imperfectly formed than the meanest reptile ; an incredible anomaly in a universe which is all order and regularity.’

In analogical reasoning, great caution must

be cherished, lest we should unwarily take it for granted, that an analogy exists where there is none, or that a principle which we have found to exist in one case, extends to other cases, where the circumstances are not really similar. A mistake here has given rise to many capital errors. It may not seem at the first glance to be prolific in great evils, but so indeed it is. Take an illustration from *physiology*. The ancient anatomists, under the influence of ignorance or superstition, were not accustomed to dissect human bodies, but confined their investigations to those animals, which appeared, in their structure, most nearly to resemble man. They sought to establish important principles, by reasoning analogically from the latter to the former. But the cases were not similar ; and thence they were led into the most egregious errors.

Take an illustration from *metaphysics*. When a man is engaged in deliberating on any course of conduct, or on any important question, considering all the facts and truths which may guide him to a right decision, it is common to say of him, that he is *weighing* arguments, *weighing* motives or results. We have already used this expression incidentally in the course of this essay. This phrase arises from the resemblance which there is, between a man's mind while in such a state of suspense, and a pair of balances, in which the weights, placed

alternately in the opposite scales, counterpoise each other, till at last, an accumulation on one side, turns the beam decisively. Now here, the image is vivid. The analogy is clear in regard to two points ; namely, *suspense*, and *subsequent determination*. Yet such is the difference between the natures of matter and spirit, that we cannot reason at all from the one to the other, respecting the *mode of its operation*. The ancient schoolmen, however, unmindful of this difference, asserted that when a mind is addressed by opposing motives of equal strength, it cannot possibly be determined ; and even, that if a hungry ass were placed between two bundles of hay equally inviting, he would stand still and starve to death !

Take an illustration from *politics*. The leading champion of Nullification in South Carolina, in one of his publications on that subject, relies chiefly on an argument drawn from the analogy between the government of the United States, and the agency of a commercial firm. The General Government he regards as the authorized agent of the twenty-four Sovereign States, which constitute the political firm of the Union. Now he supposes, that as in private business, a principal may overrule his agent, and in case he transgress his instructions, may nullify his acts, so in case the General Government of the United States should transgress its instructions contained in



the Constitution, a principal has the right to nullify its acts, and disavow responsibility.

Now here, an analogy is imagined to exist, where there is none. For, in the first place, it is not true, that in private business, a principal may make null and void the doings of his agent, unless he can prove against him an intentional fraud. If the principal had failed to select an agent, properly qualified for his duty, or if he had not made his instructions plain, he alone, must bear the consequences of such a failure. And in the second place, even if this were true, yet in case of a joint concern, each principal has the same right; and if one of the number be dissatisfied with the proceedings of the agent, instead of imperiling the character of the firm, by publicly disavowing responsibility, or attempting to enforce his own construction of the agent's powers, it is his duty, to present the subject to the attention of his fellow-principals, and be guided by the united expressions of their will. A principle such as the argument for nullification involves, if introduced into private affairs, would prostrate order and destroy confidence throughout the commercial world; nor would its adoption in politics be fraught with less disaster.

Take another illustration from *theology*. The inspired writers, in order to denote the moral insensibility which characterizes men as sinners, speak of them as involved in a state

of spiritual death, 'dead in trespasses and sins.' The phrase takes its rise, from the single point of resemblance, between a sinful man, and one that is physically dead, namely, insensibility. Thus we say of a cruel man, that he is dead to all the appeals of humanity; or of the miser, that he is dead to every emotion of pity. Many, however, overlooking this one point of analogy between the two cases, have reasoned thus: A dead man can do nothing; it is useless therefore to speak to him of obligation, for he is not a proper subject of it. So it is in vain that you speak to a sinner of his duty to repent, for he cannot perform it; that you address to him God's commands, for he has no power to obey them!

There is an analogical sophism now in vogue in some parts of our country, which has accomplished its author's purpose, with multitudes of minds. He first broached it, to show that faith in the gospel, however much it may affect a man's *character*, yet alters not his *state* in the sight of God. It is in substance as follows: I was born a subject of the king of Great Britain. While in my native country, I heard credible testimony respecting the government of the United States, the privileges and immunities of its citizens. I cordially believed it; but what good did my faith do for me? Did it change my state? Did it make me a citizen of this republic? No. But I crossed the Atlantic, and com-

ing to this land was told to go to yonder courthouse, and take the oath of allegiance to the government of this nation. I did so ; and then was my condition altered ; then, from having been an alien, I became a citizen. So when a subject of Satan's empire hears the scripture testimony, respecting the kingdom of Christ, what though he believe it with his heart ? Can his faith change his condition, or his relation to Christ ? No. But let him at once come forth, and in the appointed rite of baptism, let him avow his allegiance to the King of Zion ; then, and not till then, from having been an alien, does he become a fellow citizen of the saints and of the household of God.

To some, this argument may seem plausible, but throughout the whole of it, the peculiarity of Christ's kingdom as internal and spiritual is entirely overlooked ; and thence it is plainly denied, that an internal and spiritual exercise can constitute a man a subject of it ; thence the necessity of an overt act in order to the change of a man's condition is earnestly defended.

We have been rather copious in our illustrations of this principle of erroneous reasoning from analogy, because its practical developments are so numerous and so deplorable. Most of the errors which men defend by an appeal to the Bible, derive all their plausibility from the abuse of figurative expressions ; and that abuse arises from the want of a clear per-



ception of the precise points of analogy which render tropes appropriate.

We have mentioned that one important use to be made of analogy is, to aid us in defending the truths we believe, against the assaults of error. This it accomplishes chiefly, by wresting the weapons of our opponents from their hands. It goes to show, that the same objections, which are urged against the truth which we seek to establish, may be urged with equal force against other truths which are by all acknowledged. This argument the immortal Butler has wielded with signal skill. The spirit of his reasoning may be thus exhibited. Suppose you were arguing with an infidel, who was rejecting the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead ; saying that all natural appearances were against it ; that it was impossible, after the human frame had crumbled into dust, and its particles had been scattered to the four winds of heaven, that these should be restored to their primitive place, and the whole appear in a new form of beauty and of loveliness. Pointing to the chrysalis of a moth, a silk-worm or a dragon-fly, you might say, behold that inert mass ! What sign of life is there ? Who would suppose that within that little coffin lies entombed a creature, yet to come forth, fitted to mount aloft in air, and delight the eye by the splendor of its hues, and the grace of its movements ? Yet thus it

is ; and if nature displays such wondrous transformations, ‘ why should it be thought a thing incredible that God should raise the dead ? ’ that from the ruins of this frail body, another should spring forth, in heavenly beauty, and immortal youth ?

Butler’s work on the analogy between natural and revealed religion, is one of the richest offerings which human genius has ever placed upon the altar of Christianity. It should be studied for the sake of acquiring his style of reasoning. It will often present itself as an effectual guard against the wiles of error, overthrowing many a frowning argument, and developing the fallacy of many a sophism.

II. The second mode of reasoning which we mentioned is **INDUCTION**, by which we mean, the inferring of general principles from particular facts. Our confidence in this, arises from the constitutional tendency of our minds to trust in the uniformity of nature’s laws. Thus, if I perceive in several instances, that the loadstone attracts steel filings, I infer that magnetic attraction is a general law. If I perceive that in passing a certain place where a friend once resided, his image is always recalled to my mind, I infer that contiguity in place, is one of the laws of mental association. This is a way of arriving at general truths so very natural, that we can readily imagine, that a

man of common sense would say, on first hearing it, 'why this formal announcement of a thing so obvious?' General truths must of course be learned by the examination of particulars; in what other way can they be ascertained? Yet it was not in this way that the world was formerly accustomed to philosophize. They delighted to seize the general principle first; to form their theory and to find their facts afterwards; and then would generally mould them to suit their purpose. Thus error became exalted in the schools of philosophy and religion, honoured with the sanction of great names, and adorned with all the dignity with which learning and genius could invest it. It is only within comparatively a recent period, that the claims of the inductive system have been acknowledged. Lord Bacon, who arose in the fifteenth century, has the honour of being called its father. At sixteen years of age, he became dissatisfied with the reigning philosophy, and then commenced the workings of his powerful mind to devise some better way. The great principle which he struck out and defended in his immortal work, called the New Method, was one which a child might comprehend, but one which the world had not thought much of before; which was, instead of seizing the general principle first, and then reasoning from it, to admit nothing as a general truth except from the

careful induction of particulars ; and thus in the study of facts to lay the foundation of a philosophy, which should stand by its own strength, and mock all controversy.

Such was the authority of Aristotle in the schools, that the new method made its way in the world with great difficulty, until at last the achievements of the Newtonian philosophy exhibited the grandeur of the principle, in a blaze of light, to an admiring world.

But though the name and the system of Bacon are in the present age highly lauded, yet the spirit of his school has not been sufficiently cherished. Men are still too easily led astray by novelty, or awed by authority, or fascinated with the glare of paradox. There is too much of vain speculation in natural and moral science. To this, some men of exalted genius are constitutionally prone. They have active reasoning powers, and brilliant imaginations ; but lacking judgment, patience and industry, they choose rather to ‘compass themselves about with sparks of their own kindling,’ than to be guided by the steady, sober light of truth. In such a man, as says the author of the *Natural History of Enthusiasm* respecting the heretic by temperament, ‘There is more of intellectual mobility than of strength : a ready perception of analogies gives him both facility and felicity in collecting proofs, or rather illustrations, of whatever opinion he adopts.

So copious are the materials of conjectural arguments which crowd upon him, and so nice is his tact of selection, and so quick his skill of arrangement, that ere dull sobriety has gathered up his weapons, he has reared a most imposing front of defence. Pleased and even surprised with his own work, he now confidently maintains a position, which at first he scarcely thought to be seriously defensible. Having convinced himself of the certainty of the new truth, and implicated his vanity in its support, deeper motives stimulate the activity of the reasoning and inventive faculties, and he presently piles demonstration upon demonstration to such an amazing height, until it becomes in his honest opinion sheer infatuation to doubt. Then modesty, caution, hesitation, seem treasons against conscience and heaven.'

In inductive reasoning, great caution is necessary, lest a general truth be inferred from too small a number of facts. The two great parties in geology furnish an illustration of this. One class, contemplating the formation of primitive rocks, and other phenomena which the crust of the earth presents, declare that the interior of it, is all water. Cordier, however, penetrating into mines, and the deepest recesses, finds that heat increases in the ratio of one degree for every forty-six feet; thence infers that at the depth of sixty miles, rocks must be melted; and then, as he looks over



the surface of the globe, and observes two hundred volcanoes spouting forth burning lava, feels confident that the interior of the earth is all fire. The learned world, moreover, have not yet forgotten Capt. Symmes' lucid argument to prove that the interior of the globe is perfectly hollow. Now if one of these theories be true, the others must be false, and each can present a splendid array of facts in its defence. A prudent man, therefore, will hesitate to give his full assent to either, until he sees that a sufficient number of facts have been compared, to furnish strong ground to rest upon.

Phrenology has but of late attracted the world's attention. If its truth shall ever be fully established, it must be by an extensive and rigid induction. A few individuals have already placed the science upon an eminence, where it receives general respect ; but as yet too few have been engaged in pursuing the inductive process, to bring forth such results, as shall command the entire and universal assent of unbiassed minds.

Our practical judgments of men and things, if of any considerable worth, must be founded upon induction. Yet every careful observer of the ways of the world, has doubtless been struck with the rashness with which men form their general opinions ; their estimations of each other, of states and of nations. English

travellers, who have visited our country, seem often to have reasoned *a priori*, rather than from observation; that is, to have judged beforehand from our circumstances what kind of a people we must be, and then to have declared that we are just such a people. One perhaps has imbibed in his youth the old sentiment, that 'a cold climate makes cold hearts;' and then, on visiting New England, has written in his journal, 'the New Englanders are a cold-hearted people,' all facts to the contrary notwithstanding. And how prone are we ourselves to judge of the character of a nation, which has poured forth among us a vast amount of the dregs of her populace, by the specimens which she has been forced to send us. How common a sentiment is it among Americans, that the Irish are base and degraded beings, while in truth, there walks not upon the earth a race of men, who have nobler stamina of character than the native Irishman.

The application of the inductive system to the study of theology, is of all things else, in this age of religious controversy, 'most devoutly to be wished.' The great question which every man must settle at the outset is, Has the Bible a divine origin? He who examines this question with right feelings, will doubtless see upon the book the impress of God's signature. Then let him 'search the scriptures' with the most perfect docility. Let



him sit at Jehovah's feet and learn of Him. Let him study the great facts of revelation, and when he has classified them, he will have a system of theology, and all the system that any man needs. But let him receive his opinions first, and construct them, as he may think, into a scheme of perfect symmetry, and then come to the Bible to seek evidence in its support, and probably he will find as much as he desires ; he may strengthen and adorn it in every part, by detached passages which he calls ' the true sayings of God ;' and yet after all, he may find out at last, that though he had had much light, yet it was not that which ' cometh from above ;' that though he were wise indeed, yet that he had been ' wise above that which was written ;' and that the glow of beauty which his system possessed, was that which his own imagination had thrown around it, and not that imparted by the inspiration of the Spirit.

III. We have now only to glance at the third mode of reasoning which has been mentioned, which is, DEDUCTION. By this we mean the deriving of a particular truth from a general principle. This general principle may be one which our constitution compels us to take for granted, which we perceive by *intuition*, or as a simple *dictate of conscience*, or it may be one which we have reached by a pre-

vious induction. But in whatever way we obtain the general truth, when we have got it, we are then prepared for the use of the syllogism. Aristotle defined several forms of syllogisms, but they all range under this one great principle ; 'Whatever may be affirmed or denied universally of any idea, may be affirmed or denied universally of any number of particulars, comprehended under that idea.' For instance : 'We hold this truth to be self-evident ; all men are born free and equal ;' Africans are men : therefore Africans are born free and equal. Arguments which rest upon general principles, may be easily reduced to a syllogistic form.

Time was, when the syllogism was deemed the chief instrument to be used in the discovery of truth. That time has passed away. It was an age of darkness and of doubt, and yet of keen scholastic disputation. The syllogism is now regarded only as a convenient mode of stating truth, after it has been discovered. We may well rejoice, that intellectual and moral science are now established upon a firmer basis than they then possessed. Only let us live worthy of our high advantages. Let us divest our minds of every evil prejudice. And as the compass of the mariner, in the dark and dreary night, when the winds howl and the ocean roars around him, directs his eye to the pole-star, and guides him safely on his course,

so shall the love of truth for the truth's own sake, guide us securely amidst all the strife of parties and the clashing of opinion.

The application of the principles of moral reasoning to the evidences of Christianity, is one of the noblest uses to which the science can be turned. No question can be more momentous than this, Is the Gospel of Christ a revelation from God? On such a subject, doubt must be painful; and in order to reach a correct decision, it is necessary that the inquiring mind should, clearly, see what kind of evidence it is, which the case admits. An error on this point may be fatal. No one should expect mathematical demonstration. The argument is evidently 'cumulative;' and when calmly surveyed in all its length and breadth and depth and height, will indeed appear to be a well-based and lofty structure, radiant in every part with the impress of God. The work which is now before the reader, is not designed to present this evidence in all its extent, but rather to suggest hints respecting the manner in which the subject should be studied; to bring to view important principles which should be well remembered, and faithfully applied. These principles are such as commend themselves to the common sense of the world, and such as every wise man would act upon in the common affairs of life. Their

simplicity enstamps them with the greater value, and yet, on that very account, there is danger of their being depreciated. There is no subject which we would more earnestly commend to the attention of young and inquiring minds. The study of it will furnish an excellent intellectual discipline, and will also exert a salutary influence upon the heart.

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AUTHOR'S

## P R E F A C E.

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To form a habit of reasoning justly, is one of the most important objects of education. Much has been done to promote this object by writers on logic, and on the human understanding. Their writings, however, relate principally to reasoning on subjects of pure science, and abstract truths, or the necessary relations of ideas. Little, comparatively, has been written, to teach us how to reason on practical subjects ; but that little is highly valuable. Mr. Locke, in his Essay on the Human Understanding, has treated briefly on Probability ; and the author of the Port Royal Art of Thinking, has, at the latter end of his work, introduced two or three chapters on the application of reason to the events of human life. Both of these writers furnish useful observations on these subjects. Dr. Watts, in the second part of his Treatise on Logic, and his book on the Improvement of the Mind, has laid down many important rules to direct the judgment on practical questions. In the



Encyclopædia Britannica, also, under the head of metaphysics, there are some just remarks on the theory of observation, and testimony. And Dr. Campbell, in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, has explained at considerable length, the theory of moral evidence.

Were young men willing to take the pains of collecting from these, and other authors, all that they could meet with on the subject of moral evidence, they might form, for themselves, a system sufficient to answer every desirable purpose. But this is scarcely to be expected. For, in the course of education, the principal use of reason is in subjects purely scientific. It is not, therefore, surprising that students should bestow their chief attention upon that use of it, and neglect, to a great degree, all those principles and rules of argumentation, which they have then no occasion to apply. Hence, it may naturally be expected, that, however well qualified they may be to argue on scientific subjects, they should be incapable of reasoning justly on human events. When their education is finished, it is scarcely to be supposed, that they would recur to those books, which they had formerly studied, to collect from them such information as they had hitherto neglected; but which they would now find of the greatest use in the conduct of life. Probably, very few men take this trouble; and this is one cause, why so few reason correctly on questions which admit of no higher evidence than probability.

It is, however, obvious, that that use of reason, which teaches us how to regulate our judgments,



expectations, and conduct, must be much more important, than that, which relates only to science. Of course, it ought to be studied with greater attention. But, this it never will be, unless it be studied professedly, as a separate system.

It may be thought, perhaps, that a man, who has formed a habit of reasoning justly on scientific subjects, will be capable of applying that habit to matters of probability, without studying any system of moral evidence. That the study and practice of demonstrative reasoning will be found of great use towards acquiring skill in moral evidence, is true. It is not meant, therefore, to discourage an application either to logic or to mathematics. On the contrary, an application to both, is strongly recommended, as the best possible means of acquiring an ability of thinking closely and correctly, and of reasoning conclusively. But, then, it is true also, that this study will rarely be found sufficient to enable a man to reason justly on probable subjects; both because the principles in demonstrative and moral reasoning differ much; and, because the mind that has been accustomed to yield its assent to demonstration only, generally finds great difficulty in being satisfied with a lower species of evidence. Hence arises that tendency to scepticism, which has been imputed to the study of mathematics. And, hence it is, that the transition, even from pure to mixed mathematics, is often attended with a want of that satisfaction, which had hitherto been enjoyed. Both these are occasioned by not considering, that different subjects admit of different kinds of evidence;

and by the mind's not being accustomed to yield its assent to that kind of evidence, of which the subject admits.

He who has not attained the knowledge, and accustomed himself to the use of correct and fixed principles of decision, on the weight of evidence for matters of fact, must engage in the investigation of many important questions, such, for instance, as the truth of Christianity, with great disadvantage. The principles, on which he will be required to decide, being new to him, will probably appear to have been framed merely for the occasion, and will therefore be suspicious. But had he pursued this study with due attention, these principles would be familiar to him: he would have been accustomed to apply them to various subjects, and to see that they lead to correct conclusions. To him, therefore, they would afford both a safe and satisfactory ground of decision on the question proposed.

This study will, also, be a means of preservation from many errors in the ordinary occurrences of life. Few practical questions call for our decision, on which we are not previously interested on the one side, or the other. The having to search for our principles of judgment, while under the influence of interest, must be an inlet to delusion, in addition to the danger of misapplying them. But, if we have been accustomed to the use of certain fixed principles of evidence, they will naturally present themselves to our minds, when occasions for their application arise; nor shall we be able to decide inconsistently with them, without being conscious of do-

ing wrong. It would, therefore, be useful to acquire a knowledge of the principles of moral evidence, as well as of those of demonstration ; and, perhaps, to pursue the study of these different kinds of evidence at the same time.

The Author's motive for engaging in the discussion of this subject, was, his having observed persons of ability and education delude themselves as to the truth of facts, of importance to their moral conduct, by applying to them principles of reasoning, unsuited to the nature of the case. With the principles of demonstrative reasoning, they were well acquainted ; but of those of moral evidence they had not a sufficiently clear and settled knowledge, to put them on their guard against the delusions of inclination or interest in themselves, or the sophistry of others. Hence, even their knowledge of morality, and the general rectitude of their intentions, became of little avail to direct their conduct ; for, an error in the fact, is as fatal to virtue, as an error in the principles of morality.

As there is no book written, professedly, on this subject, (at least as far as the author of this work can learn,) these hints are offered ; but not as new thoughts. For, in the present advanced state of science, little that is new, can be expected on a subject of this nature. Nor are they proposed, as comprising a complete system, but merely as an introduction to the study of moral evidence.

To the learned reader, if any such should honour this work with a perusal, an apology may be necessary for the discussion of subjects, which may appear

too obvious to need explanation or proof. But, it should be observed, that this work is intended for the use of those who are only beginners in the science of moral reasoning ; and that, for their information, it was necessary to explain, and prove, even such points as would be perfectly obvious to the more experienced reasoner. This appeared to be the more requisite, because, however obvious those points may be, many of them are too frequently neglected in practice, and that, by persons whose character gives great weight to their example. Hence it was desirable, that the beginner should be furnished with a weight of proof, calculated to counterbalance such authority.

To most readers, it will be necessary to apologize for the dryness of the book. Something of this must be attributed to the nature of its subject ; for a treatise on the principles of reasoning, can scarcely be otherwise than dry. Yet, some of the blame may, perhaps, be due to the author, for not having interspersed his work with a greater number of quotations, and interesting anecdotes, to relieve the fatigue of his reader. He would have done this, had it been in his power. But the nature of his situation, and his constant engagement in an employ, which nearly engrosses his time, precluded his collecting, either from reading or conversation, such quotations or anecdotes, as would suit his purpose.

EDITOR'S

## P R E F A C E.

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ONE of the most important privileges secured to us by the Constitution, is, Trial by Jury. No citizen in this country can be charged with an evil and punished for it, until the charge shall have been substantiated according to established rules of evidence. But it is the jury who are to determine when an alleged fact is proved; and, of course, *they* and not the counsel only, ought to be familiar with the rules of evidence. And yet, how small a portion of those who may be called, in the jury-box, to decide questions involving the lives and property of their fellow citizens have ever received one hour's direct instruction on the Science of Evidence! Our schools have their 'Political Class Book,' by which to initiate youth into the principles of our National and State Governments, and it is well; our Colleges take ample care to discipline the minds of our young men in the science of demonstration, and in those of Logic and Metaphysics; this also is well: but neither one nor the other of these, covers one portion of the field of general education which needs to be occupied. Neither Politics, nor Mathematics, nor Logic, nor



Metaphysics, engage much of the attention, nor form any part of the education, of thousands who are liable, every day, to be called to decide questions of vital interest to their fellow-citizens and the State, in the halls of justice. It is truly surprising that it has never occurred to those who give a direction to public sentiment on the subject of Education, that every child who may hereafter stand in a jury-box to decide on a question of fact 'according to evidence,' ought to be instructed in the laws of evidence; so that he may *know for himself* when a fact is proven; and that this instruction ought, in its elements, and some of its details, to be imparted even in the common school. With a hope that this hitherto neglected, but highly important branch of education may receive a merited degree of attention, the following treatise is introduced to the notice of the public. To facilitate the application of the principles of Moral Evidence to the thousand subjects which are established by testimony, the Editor has made choice of **ONE**, — The Divine Origin of the Christian Religion, — and has shown the applicability of these principles to that subject.

The religion of the Bible is not one which forbids those to whom it addresses itself, to examine its claims; it does not profess that they are not to be ascertained by the ordinary modes of investigating truth; but, on the contrary, it comes to us invested with just such evidences of its truth as are seen to invest other truths of a similar nature; i. e. other moral truths; and the principal difference is in the *degree* of the evidence of Revealed Religion. This

is incomparably greater than that which establishes any other moral truth whatever ; and we are justified in expecting that it should be so : for Christianity comes to us professing to be not only *true*, but *divine* ; to be directly from God, and coming with such pretensions, it is reasonable that they should be sustained by a correspondent degree of evidence.

But we ought always to bear in mind that Christianity, in common with all moral truth, does not admit of any but moral evidence in its support, and consequently, that the greatest possible amount of that evidence can only produce, in our minds, a moral certainty ; we can never, *strictly speaking*, have a *demonstration* of its truth, because that kind of evidence which, alone, produces demonstration, (viz. mathematical evidence, or the evidence of abstract truth,) is not applicable to moral subjects. Christianity is a religion founded on facts ; if they are true, that is true also. The question to be settled is, whether the alleged facts are true ; and this is to be settled, like all other questions of fact, by evidence. The principles, according to which all other questions of fact are settled, are applicable to this ; all, therefore, that is necessary to qualify a candid inquirer to arrive at the truth on this important subject, is to be acquainted with the science of Moral Evidence in general, and to apply its principles to the evidence in favour of Revealed Religion, in particular.

The following treatise, as originally written, was designed as an ' Introduction to the study of Moral Evidence ;' but was merely general in its application : or rather, was without any *application* at all ;



it was a synopsis of the principles of the science. But the beauty, and utility, and force, of a principle, is never so clearly seen as in its application; and it is the object of this work, as now presented to the public, to make such an application of the principles of the science of Moral Evidence to the credibility of the Christian Religion; and thus to show that the facts on which it rests are as credible as any matter of fact whatever, being supported by the *same kind* of evidence; and more credible than they, as being supported by a *greater degree* of the evidence which establishes them, than any other facts can boast.

When the Editor first entertained the idea of presenting this work to the American public, he thought of appending to each chapter or section, such thoughts of his own as should constitute an application of the principles of the science of Moral Evidence to this subject; and thus to graft his own remarks on the original work, yet so distinguished as to make it obvious which portions of the volume belonged to the original work, and which were the productions of the editor's pen. But the very numerous portions of the text which need remark, and the brevity, which, in many instances, should characterize the remarks made, presented, to his mind, considerable difficulty in the way of carrying his purpose into effect. Either some parts, which needed a few words of notice, must be entirely disregarded, or considerable repetition of matter previously discussed, must mark his additions, or the whole work must be re-written, and converted into a *mere application* of the principles of Moral Evi-

dence to the credibility of the Christian Religion. The desire to render the work *useful* forbad the disregard of any thing which might contribute to its utility, and therefore prevented the adoption of the first course,—the manifest impropriety of needless repetitions decided him on the rejection of the second, and it appeared not morally honest to adopt the third, inasmuch as, thereby, the author of the original work must have been deprived of the reputation, or at least a portion of it, which is his due ; and, moreover, the reader would not have been put in possession of the principles of the *whole* science, and thus the *general* utility of the work would not have been secured. The only course therefore which lay open to him was that which he has adopted, viz. to give the original work entire, and to make the application of the principles of the science to the subject of revealed religion in NOTES. These notes make no great pretensions to depth, or value, to the Divine, or the Student in divinity ; they are designed especially for the general reader, the Sabbath-School Teacher, the member of the Bible Class, and the simple, unlettered Christian, who knows little of the contests of the polemical arena, but yet desires to know how to give an answer ‘to them that ask of him a *reason* of the hope that is in him.’ Should this end be answered, the Editor will be more than satisfied, for the time and labor which the preparation of the work has cost him ; and in the hope that it may be the means of attaining this object, it is committed to the favourable regards of the public, and to the benediction of Heaven.



# MORAL EVIDENCE.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE NATURE OF MORAL EVIDENCE: AND WHEREIN IT DIFFERS FROM DEMONSTRATION.

MORAL Evidence is that species of proof, which is employed on subjects, directly or indirectly, connected with moral conduct. It is not, however, confined to such subjects; but is extended to all those facts, and events, concerning which we do not obtain the evidence of sense, intuition, or demonstration, and to all the general truths, which are deduced from observation. In these it still retains the name of moral evidence, a denomination which it seems to have derived from its being employed on subjects connected with moral conduct; because they form the most important class of subjects, to which it is applicable.

It differs from demonstration in several particulars.

1. They differ as to their subjects. Demonstration is employed about abstract truths, and the necessary relations of ideas. The subjects of moral evidence are matters of fact, and the connexions, whether constant or variable, which subsist among things which actually exist.

2. They differ as to the method in which they are conducted. In demonstration, we proceed from known truths, to those which are unknown, by steps, each of which is necessarily connected with that which precedes it. In a moral proof, there is no such necessary connexion between its parts. It generally consists of arguments, which are wholly unconnected with each other; and where there exists a connexion between the arguments, that connexion is not a necessary, but only a probable one. Or, to express this differently, a demonstrative proof consists of one series, each part of which is dependent on that which precedes it; but a moral proof generally consists of a number of independent arguments.

3. In demonstration, it is not necessary to consider more than one side of a question; for, if by a demonstration justly conducted, any proposition is proved to be true, it is of no consequence what may be urged against

it ; for whatever is offered as proof on the opposite side, must be a mere fallacy. But, in moral evidence, there are generally, if not always, arguments of some weight on both sides ; and therefore, before we can decide, we must examine both sides of the question, and give our assent to that on which there appears to be the greatest weight of evidence.

4. Propositions, contradictory to those which are established by moral evidence, are merely false : but those which are contradictory to such as may be demonstrated, are not only false, but absurd also. Thus the assertion, that there is no such city as Pekin, though false, is yet not absurd, for there was a time when it was true. But the proposition that 'the three angles of a triangle are not equal to two right angles,' is not only false, but also involves in it an absurdity.

5. There is a difference also in their force, or in the kind of assent which they produce. As, in demonstration, there is a necessary connexion between each successive step of the proof, the ideas compared are perceived to agree or disagree. But, in moral evidence, their agreement or disagreement is only presumed ; and that on proofs, which are, in their nature, fallible. The one, therefore, produces absolute certainty, the other only probable judgment, or at most, moral certainty. The probability may, indeed, rise so



high, as to exclude all reasonable doubt ; still, however, it falls short of absolute certainty.

6. As moral evidence does not produce certainty, no rules of moral evidence can be given, which will direct us how to form an infallible judgment in any particular case. The utmost that can be accomplished, is to give such rules as will in most, though not in all cases, in which they are fairly applied, lead to a right conclusion. This is another difference between moral evidence and demonstration. For, as demonstration admits of certainty, so rules are laid down, which in all cases capable of demonstration, will lead to truth.

7. Demonstration does not admit of degrees ; for certainty is the only assent, which can be produced by it ; but moral evidence may produce a variety of degrees of assent, from suspicion to moral certainty. For here the degree of assent depends upon the degree in which the evidence on one side preponderates, or exceeds that on the other. And, as this preponderancy may vary almost infinitely, so likewise may the degrees of assent. For a few of these, though but for a few, names have been invented. Thus, when the evidence on one side preponderates a very little, there is ground for suspicion, or conjecture. Presumption, persuasion, belief, conclusion, conviction, moral certainty, doubt,



wavering, distrust, disbelief, are words which imply an increase or decrease of this preponderancy. Some of these words also admit of epithets, which denote a further increase or diminution of the assent.

8. Moral evidence admits of an accumulation of proofs, and each independent argument increases the weight of evidence on the whole. Thus the testimonies of concurrent witnesses serve to increase the credibility of each other ; and the evidence of circumstances may confirm that of the witnesses. But demonstration admits of no accumulation of evidence ; for one just demonstration as effectually proves the truth of a proposition as many. If recourse be had to another, it is only to ascertain that the former includes no false step, but has been regularly and correctly conducted, and not to supply its defects ; for if it be defective, it is no proof at all, but a mere fallacy.

9. In demonstration, we may reason safely, from a conclusion already established, and upon that conclusion establish a second. This too, will furnish ground for further reasoning, and another conclusion : and thus we may proceed to any extent that may be requisite. But in moral evidence, we can seldom proceed with complete safety, more than one step : the second step will be more uncertain than the first ; and the third more uncertain

still ; and so on. For the first conclusion being not universally true, but true only in a certain proportion, out of a given number of cases, we are in danger of building our second process of reasoning on one of those cases, in which it may fail. In our third process, we run two risks of assuming a false ground ; and in our fourth process we run three : and so on ; whence it is evident, that it cannot be completely safe to proceed more than one step. Or, to place this matter in a different light, the first conclusion is not certainly, but only probably true. The second will be probable, only, on a supposition ; that the first should, in the event, prove true : *i. e.* it is only a probability of a probability. And the third conclusion will be probable only, on a supposition, that both the former should prove true ; *i. e.* it is the probability of a probability of a probability. Thus, in the progress, the uncertainty of the conclusion is continually increasing.

10. Moral evidence does not compel our assent, as demonstration does. If a man dispute a proposition, which is demonstrated, it must be because he does not understand its proof. But on subjects, which admit of moral evidence only, there will generally be some ground to adopt either side of the question.

Hence it affords an unfair opponent a plausible reason for dissent, and that in various de-

grees, according to its different kinds. Thus, truths founded on experience, or general notoriety, may always be disputed. It also affords an opportunity to eloquent men to represent truth in the colours of falsehood, or falsehood in the colours of truth, so as to deceive all, who are not extremely careful to detect their fallacies.

11. A further difference consists in the language which is used in them. In demonstration, all the terms are accurately defined, and are used always in the same sense. But, as moral evidence relates to more popular subjects, so those subjects are treated of in a popular, and not in a philosophical, language. The terms are seldom accurately defined, and they are not always used in the same sense. Figures of speech are introduced, and all those rhetorical licenses admitted, which contribute more to ornament, than precision. Hence, in moral evidence, we can rarely obtain as distinct a view, either of the question, or of the arguments, by which it is to be proved, as in demonstration.\*

\* From these distinctions between Moral Evidence and Demonstration, it is plain that the truth of the Christian religion can never be *demonstrated*; it is, in the nature of things, impossible. But, it is also true, that there is no shadow of justice in the assertion, that its truth cannot be *proved*. It becomes us then to guard our expressions, relative to the proofs of the truth of our religion; and, as nearly as possible, to define our

From what has been said, it is manifest that moral evidence is vastly inferior to demonstration. Hence, perhaps, some persons may conclude, that the study of it will be of little use. But, however inferior it may be to demonstration, it is not possible to avoid using it constantly. For it is the only light afforded us to form our practical opinions, and regulate our conduct. Without attending to it, we can neither act, nor cease to act. We cannot even subsist without acting upon it; since it cannot be demonstrated that our food will not poison, instead of nourishing us. Instead, therefore, of contemning it on account of its inferiority, it becomes us to improve to the utmost, the light which it affords, by qualifying ourselves to apply it as correctly as possible on every occasion. This must be incumbent, not only on the student in science, but also on every man, whatever be his business or employment.

Besides it may be observed, that the necessity of acting on this inferior species of evi-

terms, and use them according to the definition. Otherwise, we shall sometimes expose ourselves to the cavils of infidels, for our want of precision; and, at others, by the strength and incorrectness of our expressions relative to the proof of its divine origin, shall excite to reaction the minds of those, who have been used to yield only to demonstrative reasoning; and lead them to deny the *proof* of what is not *demonstrated*.—ED.

dence, is suited to the state\* in which we are placed : a state, in which all the faculties received from our Creator, are put to the trial. Now, the clear light of demonstration, would be ill adapted to the trial of our understandings, on practical questions ; because, it could scarcely fail of compelling us to a right judgment, even in spite of the most perverse inclinations, or the greatest insincerity. But, being under the conduct of moral evidence,

\* How admirably adapted to our present state, (one of probation) is the *kind* of evidence by which the truth of revealed religion is established. It is not that which *forces*, but that which *induces* our assent. Man is in the best state for acquiring a knowledge of what is truth, when he is cordially disposed to embrace it, whatever it may be. A person in this state of mind will be at no uncertainty as to the origin of the Christian religion, though it is incapable of demonstration ; for he has ample evidence, and of the proper kind, to bring him to a satisfactory conclusion on the point. Were the truth of revealed religion demonstrated, there would be no room for the exercise of faith in the revealer. We should see and know, not only that it was true, but that it *could not be false* ; we should say to God, as the men of Samaria did, to the woman of that city, ‘ We believe *not for thy saying*, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.’ Man could not be a moral agent in receiving a divine revelation, were its truth demonstrated ; but, being proved only by moral evidence, he *can* err, if his heart be averse to the truth, though he need not, and will not, if the love of truth rule in his heart ; hence the nature of the evidence by which the truth of revelation is sustained, affords an admirable test of the moral state of those to whom it is proposed.—ED.



our sincerity is continually put to the test. Hence, if a man wish to make his views of duty consist with his inclination, or present interests, he can seldom want a pretext for so doing. And the greatest talents, natural or acquired, will not secure him against this delusion ; but, on the contrary, rather promote it ; for, they only furnish him with more able counsel to deceive himself and others. But, if he be sincerely desirous of knowing his duty, though he possess but ordinary abilities, he may generally attain the knowledge of it. For, notwithstanding the inferiority of moral evidence to demonstration, it is capable of affording sufficient proof to influence the judgment, and direct the conduct of any reasonable and honest man, who is disposed to make a fair use of his talents. For, experience shows that men err, not so much from the want of light, as because they are influenced by their passions and interests.

Two extremes have been fallen into, from not duly attending to the difference between moral evidence and demonstration. On the one hand, probable proof has been called demonstration. When a writer has produced, in favour of some important point, a variety of reasons, all of the probable kind, yet of great cogency, and has shewn, that all the objections against it are either fallacious, or but of little weight, he often asserts that he has *de-*



*monstrated* his position. He may, indeed, have so far proved it, as to have excluded all reasonable doubt; yet he has, nevertheless, not demonstrated it. For, the highest degree of probability does not amount to a demonstration; and nothing can be a demonstration, where there is not an intuitive, and necessary connexion between every successive step of the proof. This practice has, probably, arisen from an inclination to magnify every thing important; and, from a disposition to the use of figures of speech. As demonstration is the highest species of proof, when we have so fully proved any point, as to have excluded all reasonable doubt, we say, by the figure hyperbole, that we have *demonstrated* it. This, however, is improper; because things, which differ in their nature, ought to be distinguished by different names; and when different names have been invented for them, it is wrong to confound the things by using the name of the one for the other. It has, besides, a tendency to defeat its own end; for, with all, who have been accustomed to a more accurate use of words, it is calculated rather to weaken, than to strengthen, the force of the proof; inasmuch as it excites them to inquire, not whether the question has been proved by sufficient evidence, but whether there is an intuitive and necessary connexion between each successive step of that proof: and, as it

is evident that there is no such connexion, doubts are raised in their minds.

On the other hand, a position, for which sufficient probable evidence, is brought, is often denied to be proved. This happens most frequently when an opponent demands our assent to some point, which seems unfavourable to our present interests. But, the word proof ought not to be confined to demonstration, any more than the name demonstration to be given to every species of proof. Lawyers have their proofs, as well as mathematicians. And should a mathematician censure a lawyer, who had asserted that to be proved, for which sufficient evidence, according to the established rules of law, had been adduced, because it had not been demonstrated, he would be considered as absurd. Divines, too, have their proofs; and though they do not amount to demonstration, yet, if they be sufficient to exclude all reasonable doubt, they ought to be admitted to be proofs. In truth, wherever there is produced, in favour of any proposition, the highest kind of evidence of which it admits, and in a sufficient degree to outweigh all that can be urged against it, it may properly be said to be proved.

## CHAPTER II.

ON THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF MORAL EVIDENCE,  
WITH OBSERVATIONS ON THE WEIGHT OF EACH.

IN this chapter, it is proposed, to inquire into the different kinds of moral evidence; the degree of credit which is usually given to each kind; and the influence which each may reasonably have on our judgment.

The first kind is, *observation* or *experience*. The observation of a specific fact, or what, perhaps may, in strict propriety, be called experience, does not belong to this subject, but to a higher species of evidence. For, if I can recollect that I observed a certain fact, I have the evidence of certainty for its having existed, and not that of probability. But, the observation or experience here intended, consists of the general conclusions which have been deduced from various subjects of the same kind. It is also *personal* observation; *i. e.* it consists of the conclusions which a man has deduced from his *own* observation.\*

\* It is rather inference from observation or experience, than observation or experience itself, which the author has in his mind. Thus, the apostles had the evidence of experience or personal observation, of the reality of the miracles of Christ;—this is evidence of a

The specific facts, which are the subjects of our observation, are all of them individuals ; and taken separately, furnish us with no other knowledge, than that of their own existence. But, when we compare together the observations which we have made, on different facts of the same kind,\* we are enabled to draw

higher kind than moral evidence, and produces absolute certainty, as to the facts themselves. But the miracles led them to *infer* the Messiahship of him who wrought them ; seeing they were wrought to confirm his claims to that office. But of this inferred truth, even the apostles could possess only moral evidence. The Messiahship of Jesus was only a *moral*, and not an *absolute* certainty to them : i. e. that *Jesus is the Messiah*, was their 'inference from the observation' they had made, or the experience they had had, of his miracles. But *we* have not the evidence they had, even of the reality of the miracles ; it is not an absolute, but only a moral certainty, to us, that they were performed, and of course our belief of the Messiahship of Christ (so far as it is derived from belief in the reality of his miracles) is an inference from a moral, and not from an absolute certainty, and must of course be weaker than that of apostles. For as an inference from absolute certainty, can produce only moral certainty ; inference from the latter, must produce a less complete conviction than that from the former, unless equals taken from unequals should leave the remainders equal, which is absurd.—ED.

\* Thus when the witnesses of our Lord's miracles compared his cures with those of Physicians, they drew the general conclusion that he was divinely commissioned, or spoke the words of God : and when he opened his commission and declared his character, they further drew the particular conclusion that he was 'the Christ, the Son of the living God.'—ED.

from them general conclusions, which are applicable to particular cases. The nature of those conclusions, the way in which they are deduced, and the manner of applying them to particular cases, varies according to the nature of the subjects observed.

On comparing together different facts of a similar kind, they appear to have been sometimes *uniform*, at other times *various*.\* Thus,

\* It is sometimes objected against the miracles of Christ, that he did not always produce effects without the use of means, and that, therefore, we are not warranted, in such cases, in ascribing to him the exertion of truly *miraculous* powers, as in the case of the man whose eyes he anointed with clay, or his, whose ears he opened by putting his own fingers in them. Also, that in some cases his cures were, at first, imperfect, as in the case of the man who at first saw men as trees walking, and afterwards perceived objects distinctly. All such cases, however, are included in this sentence of our author. There was *diversity* in the *mode* of our Lord's procedure, but *uniformity* in the *results*. These were *always* miraculous; and indeed the means he employed were such as, in their nature, are utterly inefficacious, or positively preventive of the effect which actually followed. Will earth, put into the eyes, restore sight to the blind? Will it not rather produce blindness even in those who can see? And what deaf man was ever restored to hearing, as a natural consequence of thrusting the physician's finger into his ear? but especially, who ever heard of this operation as a remedy for stammering, or any other impediment in speech. Mark 7 : 32: As, therefore, the effects were uniformly miraculous, the inference from the miracles, though performed in a variety of modes would be the same; and the evidence of all would be direct, in support of the Saviour's Messiahship — ED.

the common operations of nature, as, the ebbing and flowing of the tides, are perceived to be *uniform*. The same *uniformity* is observed in the properties of substances; as the ductility and malleability of gold, the melting of lead in fire, and its sinking in water. But the state of the weather, the direction of the wind, the effects of many articles of food and medicine, the success of most of the plans and operations, in which men engage, are all observed to be *various*. Again, facts of some kinds will appear to be either uniform or various, according as our observation of them is more or less extensive. Thus, the moon, if observed, during the space of only a few days, will exhibit great variety, both in the time of its rising, and in the form in which it appears; and thence may be called, as it has been by poets, ‘the inconstant moon.’ But if the observation be extended to a longer period, these changes will appear to take place uniformly. Hence, facts of this kind may be properly considered as uniform. Thus, then, the subjects of our observation may be reduced to two classes, viz: those which are uniform, and those which are various.

First. In things that are *uniform*, general conclusions are drawn, by collecting those points in which the uniformity is observed, neglecting those, in which they have been



perceived to differ, and making those uniform points the predicate of a proposition, of which the things themselves are the subject.\* Thus, on comparing our observations of the sun, we find that every day it rose and set, sometimes involved in clouds, at others shining with splendor. Neglecting, then, the circumstances in which it differed, and attending to those only, in which it was uniform, we deduce this general conclusion, that the sun rises and sets every day. Or, recollecting that all the masses of gold, which we have ever seen, however various their forms, were yet yellow, and very heavy; neglecting the varieties of their forms, we infer, that a yellow colour, and great weight, are properties of gold. This species of reasoning is called by logicians, an induction of particular facts of the same nature.†

\* For the information of those who are wholly unacquainted with logic, it may be necessary to observe, that a proposition is a sentence, in which any thing is affirmed, or denied of another thing. That the subject of a proposition is that, concerning which any thing is affirmed or denied; and that its predicate is that which is affirmed or denied of the subject. Thus, 'Plato was a philosopher,' is a proposition, of which Plato is the subject, and Philosopher is the predicate.

† Thus the witnesses of the miracles of Christ would place his wonderful works among things *uniform*; for he never failed of performing what he undertook. They would neglect the varieties of sometimes going to the patient, and sometimes healing at a distance; sometimes uttering his mandate, and at others healing in

The conclusions, thus drawn from uniform subjects, are general truths. Thus, it is a general truth, that night succeeds day, and day night; that Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter, follow each other in regular succession, that iron sinks in water, and that wax melts in fire.

In applying these general conclusions, they teach us what to expect in every particular case: and the expectations, founded upon them, are attended with a high degree of moral evidence.

But it should be remarked, that the more frequently we have repeated our observations of uniform subjects, and the more various the circumstances are, under which they have been made, the more correct will our conclusions be, and the more safely may they be applied to particular cases.\*

silence; sometimes employing applications to the bodies of the diseased, and at others, curing without any such application, &c. and seizing only on the results, would see that these, being truly miraculous, all testified that he was what he professed to be,—the Christ, or Anointed of God. This would be the general truth to which the observation or experience of his miracles would lead the witnesses.—ED.

\* Hence we perceive the confidence we are warranted in placing in the conclusions of the Apostles relative to the reality of our Lord's miracles: for they witnessed the performance of *vast numbers* of them, (John 21:25) and under *every variety* of circumstances, and their uniform testimony is, to the unquestionable reality of the wonders he performed. Matt. 4:23,24; 9:35; 12:15. Acts 2:22.—ED.

It will, perhaps, be objected to this theory, that it is a rule amongst philosophers, that one correct experiment is sufficient to establish a general truth. Whether this rule be, or be not, just, it will, when duly considered, be found not at all inconsistent with what has been advanced. We are here speaking of the conclusions, which a man may be able to deduce from his own personal observation, unassisted by any information derived from others. Their rule supposes the experimentalist to be possessed of much previous information, derived, not only from his own experience, but from the general observation of mankind. When a philosopher draws from experiment a general conclusion respecting the properties of any substance, he presumes that that identical substance, on which he tried his experiment, possessed exactly the same qualities with all others which are considered as of the same nature. Thus, if he would determine the specific gravity of pure gold, he must presume that the gold, which he uses for the purpose, possesses the same properties with all other pure gold. Now, on what is this presumption founded? A man, just engaging in researches into nature, and unacquainted with the discoveries of others, could not safely presume this. He could not yet know, that such is the uniformity of nature in her operations, that the same

qualities would be found in pure gold, at all times, and in every part of the world. But since, by the experience of many ages, the fact of this uniformity of nature has been established, the philosopher assumes it as the basis of his reasonings, and draws his conclusions from it, with perfect satisfaction. The conclusion, therefore, drawn from a single experiment, is not, strictly speaking, dependent on that experiment alone, to the exclusion of all other information on the subjects of nature. On the contrary, it pre-supposes an experience of vast extent, derived from the general observation of mankind.

As no man can be supposed to be at this time entirely unacquainted with the general experience of mankind, it may be asked, of what use it can be to lay down directions applicable only to a state of ignorance? I answer, that in order to understand rightly the subject of personal observation, it is necessary to consider it simply, as it is in itself, unconnected with the information derived from other sources. When it is clearly understood in this simple state, it will be understood, with greater ease, and correctness, when combined with that information. It will then be more easily perceived for what part of our knowledge we are indebted to our own unassisted efforts; and also, in what manner we must proceed in those inquiries,

which must be conducted by our own personal observation.

That subjects, which have been observed to be uniform, do, in fact, excite an expectation of the continuance of the same event, under the same circumstances, is confirmed by experience. It is evident, that they produce this effect even in children, and that in their earliest infancy, when, if they exercise reason at all, it must be only in the slightest degree. It is by this effect of experience, that they must learn the meaning of words. For, as there is no natural connexion between things, and the names by which they are called, it can be only by observing, that the persons, who surround them, constantly connect a certain sound with a certain object, that they can learn to regard that sound as its name. This information cannot, at first, be conveyed to them by words; because they are, as yet, unacquainted with the words necessary for that purpose. Experience operates in the same way, also, upon brutes; and by this means dogs, for instance, are taught so far to understand the meaning of certain sounds, as to be able to execute the commands of their masters in various particulars. As to the existence, then, of the fact, there can be no doubt; but the principles upon which this fact depends, have never, as far as the author of this tract can learn, been satisfacto-

rily assigned. Some have attempted to account for it on the principle of association. But it does not appear that the association of ideas naturally excites an expectation of our finding their objects always connected together. Having met a friend at a certain inn, I have associated the idea of the inn, with that of my friend; but this association excites in me no expectation of my always meeting with him there; or even of my meeting him there at any particular time, unless I have some other reason to expect it. The fact seems to proceed on the presumption, that what has been observed to be uniform, depends on some established law of nature: and the evidence, which we have for the existence of these laws of nature, is the general experience of mankind.

Secondly. The other class of facts, are those which have been observed to happen *variously*. Conclusions are drawn from our observation of these, by collecting together, into one sum, all those instances in which we have perceived them to exist in a certain way, and, into another sum, all those in which we observed them to exist in a different way; and then, comparing these sums together, to determine the ratio which they bear to each other. If the instances on each side be equal in number, we conclude, that the general nature of the fact is uncertain. When they



are unequal, we conclude, that that is the more general nature of the fact, which is conformable to the side on which the excess lies; and our conclusion becomes so much the stronger, in proportion as the instances on the one side, are found to be more numerous than those on the other.

In applying these conclusions to particular cases, where the instances on each side have been observed to be equal in number, we form no expectation at all in what way the event will happen in any proposed case; but regard it as a matter of equal chance, or perfect indifference. But, when the instances on one side have been observed to exceed those on the other, we naturally form some degree of expectation, that they will happen in each proposed case, as we have most frequently observed them. And the greater the ratio is, which those on the one side bear to those on the other, the stronger is this expectation.

Thus, for example, if out of a great number of instances, in which men had eaten of a certain fruit, those in which it had proved harmless, were exactly equal in number with those, in which it had proved injurious, it would be considered as a matter of *absolute uncertainty*, whether or not it would injure a person, who was going to eat of it. If rather more had been injured by it, than not, it

would be considered as *probable*, that it would injure him. But, if very few out of the number had escaped injury, it would then be regarded as *highly probable* that he would be injured by it. As the ratio, which the instances on each side bear to each other, may vary almost infinitely, so may the degrees of expectation or probability vary almost infinitely, from the confines of moral certainty, to those of absolute uncertainty.

In forming our expectations from facts, which we have observed to be various, we presume, that the event is directed by some cause, known, or unknown, which, though it be not sufficiently powerful, always to control the event, but may sometimes be overcome by some unknown circumstances, yet always tends to make it happen one way, rather than the other.

Before we quit this part of the subject, it may be remarked, that we often recollect the general conclusions, which we have deduced, when we have forgotten the particular subjects, from which we deduced them. This happens especially when the subject had in it nothing new, or surprising, and was attended by no circumstances, which, by association, had fixed themselves in our minds. Thus, a man who had rarely seen a certain phenomenon in nature, or curious experiment in chemistry, would not only recollect it, but

also the circumstances of time, place, and persons, which accompanied it. Whereas, he, who had frequently seen such things, might recollect little of those circumstances; though he clearly remembered the general conclusions, which he had deduced from them. The one he would treasure up in his memory, as of importance to be recollected; while the other he would neglect, as of no consequence.

The second kind of moral evidence, to be considered, is *Testimony*.

Testimony, is either divine, or human. Divine testimony, when evidently such, produces perfect certainty. For, whatever God says, must be true. It, therefore, belongs to a higher species of evidence, than that which is the subject of this tract. But then, it must be ascertained, that, what is affirmed to be the word of God, is really God's word: and this inquiry must be conducted on the principles of moral evidence. On these principles, the authenticity of the Bible has often been investigated, and proved, with an accumulation of evidence, of which no other fact in the world ever admitted.\*

\* Miracles are evidently divine testimony: (Heb. 2:4) and of course they produce, in those who witness them, *perfect certainty* of the truth of that, for the attestation of which they are wrought. But they produce this cer-

Human testimony, is the evidence of a person, who declares that he himself observed a certain fact or event.

It is the evidence of one witness, or of more. Each separate witness, if he be really an independent or original witness, strengthens the evidence. But before it be admitted, that the evidence is thus confirmed, it should be ascertained that they are really independent witnesses. For, if the second witness did not observe the fact himself, but assented to it only on the testimony of the former, his evidence should be disregarded, and the subject rests on the testimony of the first. But, on the contrary, if they should both be found to be original witnesses of the fact, the evidence would then be strengthened in a much greater proportion than that of two to one; for the coincidence of their testimony is to be taken into the account, as well as the separate

tainty in none others than those who witness them; and others can only, at most, arrive at *moral certainty*. (see note on page 67.) The witnesses are to be examined as other witnesses are, their alleged inspiration notwithstanding; for *this* is another miracle and requires *itself* to be proved, before it can be admitted in proof of the truth of the inspired witnesses' testimony.-- Hence, not only the authenticity, (as our author observes) but the genuineness, the uncorrupted preservation, and especially, the inspiration of the sacred oracles require to be proved. Therefore the inspiration of the sacred writers is set aside in these inquiries, and their writings are examined as *mere human testimony*.  
—E.D.

weight of each. And indeed, in many cases, in which either of the two evidences, taken separately, would produce scarcely any conviction, their concurrence, if they be known to be independent witnesses, might produce nearly moral certainty. The same observation applies, and with greater force, as the number of independent concurrent witnesses increases. For it is more extraordinary, that many should coincide in their observation, and account of the same fact, than that two should ; and that in a much greater degree, than in the proportion of their numbers.\*

\* Now there are *eight* independent witnesses, whose testimony *concurs* in attestation of the truth of the Christian religion ; viz. the writers of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, and Jude ; four times as many as was, by divine appointment, made necessary to settle questions of life and death under the law (Deut. 17 : 6) : it is therefore *morally certain* that that religion is divine, even were the case decided by the number of the witnesses only. But we are to take into the account the *concurrence* of their testimony ; and when this is considered, the evidence is amazingly strengthened. Our author is aware of the impossibility of saying, definitely, *how* greatly concurrence in the testimony of witnesses strengthens the probability of its truth ;—he contents himself by saying that it is ‘in a much greater proportion than two to one.’ Let us endeavour to *approximate* correct views of the probability of the truth of the Christian religion, as shown by the concurrent testimony of eight independent witnesses, by supposing that concurrence between two, augments the probability of its truth *only in the proportion of two to one*. The *concurrence* of eight persons, in their testimony to a fact which they



Testimony may, also, be either direct, or incidental. Direct testimony, is the evidence which is professedly delivered on a certain subject. Incidental testimony, is that which is casually introduced on one subject, in the course of an evidence, or discourse, profess-

witnessed, therefore, would be, to *one* testimony to the same, as the eighth power of two to unity, i. e. as 356 to 1, their concurrence, therefore, enhances the value of their testimony as much as an addition of  $356-8=348$  to the number of witnesses would have done. But this calculation supposes them to have testified only to *one* miracle, wrought to confirm the truth of Christianity: but if they witnessed (as doubtless they did, and even more) a hundred such miracles, then is their concurrence in this testimony, to the testimony of one to the same, as the one hundredth power of  $348 \times 2^8$  to unity: a number so great, that should we present it in *figures* to our readers, we should be utterly at a loss for *words* to express their numerical signification! It would take about 280 places of figures to express it!! And yet this mighty sum would not fully express, it would only *approximate*, the probability of the reality of the miracles, to the performance of which they testify; and of the consequent truth of Christianity as supported by miracles.

For the satisfaction of the curious in such matters, we will just present to them the *tenth* power of 348, multiplied into the eighth power of 2 (356). It is thus expressed:

6.271.914.180.891.841.094.567.532.544

Or six octillions, two hundred and seventy-one septillions, nine hundred and fourteen sextillions, one hundred and eighty quintillions, eight hundred and ninety-one quadrillions, eight hundred and forty-one trillions, ninety-four billions, five hundred and sixty-seven millions, five hundred and thirty-two thousand, five hundred and forty-four.—ED.



edly delivered on another. It is of greater weight than direct testimony, because, being casually introduced, it is less susceptible of a deliberate intention to deceive.\* And, it is of the greatest weight when the subject, casually introduced, is spoken of as known by the person, to whom the discourse is addressed, and an inference, or further information, is grounded upon it; because it is improbable, that a man would speak of a fact, which he was conscious was false, as known by the person whom he addressed; since he could not expect it to be believed, but must be sensible that he should thereby weaken the force of

\* Indirect and incidental testimony, is that which is especially valuable and weighty, in proof of the genuineness of the apostolical epistles, and the authenticity of the evangelical narratives and the Acts of the apostles. The student of the science of Moral Evidence, with reference to the authenticity and genuineness of the Christian scriptures, does himself no trifling injury, and is criminally unfaithful to the study before him, if he fail to read and *study* Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*. We cannot, in this note, give more than this passing notice to the work; it must be read and *studied*, in order to exemplify, fully, the truth of our author's principle in the above paragraph;—but whoever shall give it such a perusal as it demands, will rise from it with a conviction, never to be shaken, that so many and various *undesigned* coincidences between the epistles of Paul, and the Acts of the apostles, COULD NEVER HAVE EXISTED, unless the latter had been a faithful record of real facts, and the former, the genuine letters of the great apostle of the Gentiles. We repeat, that he has *not studied* the subject of incidental, or indirect testimony, who has not *digested* Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*.—ED.

the rest of his discourse, if not provoke a public exposure.

Further, testimony is either simple, or confirmed by oath. The former is the only testimony which the ordinary events of human life afford. And, though many of these events may be of the highest importance, yet they admit of no other. On this we form our judgment of almost all facts, past or present, which do not admit of personal observation. Testimony, confirmed by oath, is nearly confined to judicial proceedings. Besides the ordinary weight of evidence, arising from the competency and presumed veracity of the witness, it introduces a solemn appeal to God, as a witness of the truth of what is affirmed, and implies a sort of self-execration, if it be false. The effect of this solemnity upon the minds of all, who are not in an unusual degree void of religion, the superior guilt of perjury, to a common lie, in the judgment of all mankind, the punishment which it incurs if detected, and the infamy\* with

\* This infamy has probably as much influence on men, as all the other causes together; for, excepting our immediate interest or gratification, and often not excepting even these, the chief principle of human conduct is, as Mr. Locke observes, the Law of Reputation. Hence it is to be lamented, that such distinctions should have obtained, respecting the nature of oaths, as tend, in some cases, to lessen the infamy of perjury. In regard to those oaths, on which the security of the property and lives of men depend, that infamy contin-

which it is followed, all combine to confirm an evidence delivered upon oath. Thus an oath for confirmation is to men an end of all strife.

Lastly, testimony is either spoken or written. In some cases written testimony is of greater weight than unwritten. Thus, an account, in writing, of words spoken long ago, if written near the time when they were delivered, is more likely to be correct, than one given from memory. So also any intricate subject, consisting of a variety of circumstances, is likely to be stated with greater accuracy, if it were committed to writing soon after it took place, than if trusted to recollection. The terms of a written contract, also, may be more safely relied upon, than those of a verbal one; because, if any of those terms happen to be forgotten, men are too apt to entertain opinions, favourable to their own interests, in their stead: besides, that an unforeseen change of circumstances often makes a change in their interests, which they are too apt to favour in the account of their engagements. In some respects, however, *viva voce* evidence is entitled to greater credit

ues unimpaired, and therefore produces beneficial effects. But, in respect to Custom House, Excise, and Election Oaths, it seems much diminished; consequently, in those cases, the Law of Reputation checks the commission of perjury only in a slight degree.

than written : as, because it does not admit of so much contrivance to deceive : because it is subject to cross-examination : and because the countenance, voice, and manner of speech of the witnesses, affords some indications of their veracity or falsehood. Added to all this, in written evidence it is requisite to ascertain, that it is really the writing of the person, to whom it is attributed.

Testimony\* seems to operate, at first, by a

\* On the principle on which credit is given to testimony, see Encyclopædia Britannica, vol. ii, p. 532, Art. Metaphysics. There, the opinions of Hume, Campbell, and Reid, are mentioned, and a farther solution offered by the author of the Article. Hume's opinion is, that experience is the sole ground of faith in testimony. To confute this, Campbell contends, that experience is the foundation of diffidence, rather than confidence, in testimony ; for infancy is credulous, and old age distrustful ; and maintains that testimony has a *natural* and *original* influence on belief. Reid says, that there are two principles implanted in our nature which correspond with each other : first, a propensity to speak the truth ; and secondly, a disposition to confide in the veracity of others. To speak truth, he considers as natural and instinctive, and as requiring no art, inducement or temptation, but only to yield to a natural impulse. Lying, on the contrary, he regards as doing violence to nature, and as never practised, even by the worst of men, without some temptation. The author of this Article in the Encyclopædia, censures the representing of the speaking of truth as *instinctive* ; because, as words are arbitrary signs, no *instinctive* connexion can ever have been formed between such signs and ideas. His opinion is, that, though there be no *natural* connexion between words and ideas, yet that words are so strongly associated to ideas, that,

sort of instinct. Great part of our knowledge is, in childhood, obtained by testimony. We then believe almost every thing that is told us by our parents, or our nurses. This, though liable to abuse, is nevertheless a wise provision ; as it is a means of furnishing us with information, which we could not otherwise obtain, but which may be necessary for our security then, or as a preparation for future improvement. At an early period, we find, that not all that is told us is true, which tends to weaken our implicit reliance on testimony. This, at first, extends only to particular things, in which we have been deceived. Then, perhaps, it applies to particular persons, whose falsehoods we have had frequent opportunities of detecting. But, as in our progress, we find, that instances of deception are not confined to particular subjects,

without a violent effort of the speaker to the contrary they must always be in conformity with each other: that, hence, it is impossible, but that a man should, without some effort, speak any thing but truth : for the ideas, of what he has seen or heard, are not of his own manufacture, but are generated by external objects ; and till they be effaced from the memory, they must always, by the law of association, make their appearance there with all their mutual relations, and in their proper dress. It may, however, be remarked, that this author has not distinguished between the *intention* to speak truth, and the *means*, or *words*, by which that intention is to be executed. Though the latter be arbitrary ; yet, the former may be instinctive.



or particular persons, we gradually learn to suspect testimony more and more. Still, as we grow older, we become even more suspicious of it, and learn by experience, that it is necessary to restrict our belief in it by certain rules. Thus, as our ability of obtaining knowledge, by other means, increases, our instinctive (if it may be so called) reliance on testimony gives way to a more rational belief in it. But, though our disposition to credit it be in some measure controlled by experience, it is seldom regulated by it sufficiently. For notwithstanding the suspicions, which frequent deceptions occasion, that disposition is still so strong in most men, that they cannot help giving more credit than is due, even to those who are known to allow themselves to deviate from truth ; the inconveniences of which they often feel. On the other hand, there appears, in a few men, a strong disposition to discredit testimony, at least on certain subjects. But, an implicit belief of testimony, and a determined rejection of it, are both extremes ; between which there is a just mean to be observed. There are rules, which, if carefully applied, will generally enable us to determine, with tolerable accuracy, when it may safely be credited, and when not. These rules must be sought from experience. In our intercourse with mankind, we observe that they generally



speak the truth, except when they are influenced by prejudice, interest, or passion ; but that, when they are under the influence of either of these, they frequently attempt to deceive. Hence, if we may reasonably presume, that in the testimony, which a witness gives, his mind is wholly unbiassed ; he may generally be regarded as worthy of credit, but not otherwise.\*

Thus, it appears, that though the credibility of testimony is not originally derived from experience, it is yet restricted by it to certain circumstances, and under these circumstances is confirmed by it.

We are often informed of things, not by the person who observed them himself, but by one who was informed of them by the observer ; and frequently the information passes through several hands before it reaches us. If all the persons, through whom the infor-

\* This is especially true when a witness testifies to that *against* which he is known to have had a strong bias. Such testimony, borne even by a single witness, produces almost moral certainty of the truth of what he affirms. Now this is precisely the case with the testimony of the apostles relative to the resurrection of Christ. They were all incredulous respecting it, even after it was declared to have occurred ; and, prior to the event, the clearest predictions of it by the Lord himself, were not understood to refer to a *real resurrection* ; but it is, again and again, said, 'they understood not that saying,' and that 'they questioned among themselves *what the rising from the dead should mean.*' Mark 9 : 10, 32.—ED.

mation has passed, be known, this, for the sake of distinction, may be called *Remote Testimony*; but, if they be unknown, it is *mere Report*. The weight of this kind of evidence is less than that of immediate testimony; and the greater the number of persons is, through whom the information has passed, the less credit does it deserve. Because, there is then so much the greater danger of their having misunderstood each other; and because the risk of misrepresentation, or of intentional deception, which are common to all testimony, is repeated as often as the information passes from one person to another.

The third species of moral evidence, is of a mixed kind, possessing partly the nature of personal observation, and partly that of testimony. It is that, by which we learn from others, those general conclusions which they have deduced by the observation of a variety of facts of the same kind. It differs from the first kind; because that relates to the general conclusions which we deduce by our own personal observation. And, it differs from testimony; because that relates to the specific facts which our informer has observed, and not to the general conclusions which he has deduced.

Here, also, it should be noticed, that the subjects observed, may have been perceived

to be either *uniform* or *various*; and nearly the same remarks may be made upon each, which have been made already, under the head of Personal Observation.

A very considerable part of the knowledge of men, even of good education, is thus obtained. For, human life is too short, and the opportunities of most men too few, to furnish them with sufficient knowledge, by personal observation.

The weight of evidence to be attributed to the information thus obtained, depends on several circumstances.

The nature of the subjects is one of these; many subjects are level to the capacity of every man. Here, no doubt can arise on account of the difficulty of making the observations. Of subjects, not as obvious as these, some are capable of more accurate observation than others. Thus, general truths in chemistry may be more easily ascertained, than in agriculture; because the circumstances of the experiments admit of being regulated at discretion in the one, but not in the other; and, because the experiments in the former are terminated in a shorter space of time, than those in the latter.

Much also depends on the character of the observers. Our knowledge of the ability of our informer, of his care and accuracy in forming his judgment, and his usual regard to

veracity, will greatly influence our reliance upon his information. The members also, of some professions, are, from their education and habits, more capable of accurate observation, than those of others. Thus, chemists are more able observers than farmers. The relations of the one are also more worthy of credit, than those of the others ; both because there is a connexion between accuracy of observation, and fidelity in relation ; while they who judge at random, generally either speak at random, or supply the defects of their observation by invention ; and because a misstatement in subjects, which admit of greater accuracy, is more easily detected, and attended with greater disgrace, than in those which are more vague.

The number of our informers, is another circumstance, by which the credibility of their information is regulated. This depends, not only on the principle which regulates belief in testimony ; but also, on its being less probable, that several persons should be mistaken in the general conclusions, which they have drawn from their observations, than one. This remark, however, supposes that the subject is such, that the observers are competent judges of it ;\* otherwise, the informa-

\* The evidence of the Messiahship of Jesus, which those who attended on his personal ministry, and witnessed his miracles, derived from their mutual commu-

tion of one person, whose skill and general veracity are known, is more worthy of belief, than of many, of very inferior capacity and credit.

When the same information is delivered by all, as far as we can learn, who have had opportunity of observing the subject, we have then the strongest proof, of which this species of evidence, taken alone, can admit. This,

unication to each other, of conclusions to which the sight of his miracles led them, was of this mixt kind; and was of the most unexceptionable character which this kind of evidence admits. 'They said, when Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man doeth?' John 7:31. Here was a communication to each other, of general conclusions, on a particular subject, derived from observations of many facts; and these facts of such a nature as enabled them to judge accurately respecting them; being subjected to the evidence of their senses, and such as their senses were entirely competent to judge of.

The evidence afforded by the woman of Samaria, to the men of her city, was also of this mixt kind, but less perfect than the former; inasmuch as only a *single witness*, (viz. the woman herself) could testify to the Lord's knowledge of her past conduct. Her language (John 4:29) is an exhibition of the conclusion to which she had come respecting Jesus, from a consciousness that her heart was open before him; and, upon this evidence, the men of the city gave much credit to the pretensions of Christ. But this credit was such as admitted of increase from personal observation, as our author observes in the next paragraph; and accordingly, when they had made that observation, they said 'Now we believe not because of thy saying, for we have heard him *ourselves*, and know, that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.' ver. 42.—ED.



however, is capable of being increased, by our own personal observation. For when, by this means, we have deduced the same conclusions, which we have learnt from others; we are more fully convinced of their truth, than if we had received them upon their information alone. For instance, he, who has tried experiments in chemistry, natural philosophy, or electricity, has a firmer conviction of their truth, than he who has only read of them. Thus, these two species of evidence, when they concur, very much confirm each other. And, when our own personal observation has been both constant and extensive, and also coincides with the experience of all, whose observations on the subject we have ever known, we have the highest degree of proof, of which moral evidence can admit; and our assent rises to moral certainty. For, whatever coincides with our own constant and extensive experience, and that of all other men, as far as we can learn, we may conclude, to happen according to some established law of nature; and therefore, not to be subject to those contingencies, to which other events are liable. It is thus, that we are satisfied of the truth of certain propositions respecting the common operations of nature, and the properties of substances; as, that the sea ebbs and flows, that the sun rises and sets, that lead sinks in



water, and melts in fire. That these propositions are true, no doubt can be entertained. Yet, even this evidence, great as it is, falls short of demonstration; and that, whether the propositions affirm the properties of their subjects as general truths, or their events in particular cases. If they affirm the properties of their subjects as general truths, the evidence depends on my own observation, and that of others. Now, my own observation, however constant, must necessarily be very limited. My inference must, therefore, be drawn from a very small number of cases, compared with those which actually exist; consequently, it is possible, that the subject may not be constant; though I have never seen it otherwise. The same may be said of the other persons, whose observations coincide with mine, both severally and collectively. For the subjects, which have been observed by all the persons, whose judgment I have been able to collect, must be but a small part of those of the same kind, which exist. Added to this, their observations have been communicated to me by testimony; and it is possible, that their testimony may be false. For such a proposition, therefore, I cannot attain certainty; consequently, the evidence falls short of demonstration. A remarkable instance of failure in a proof of this kind occurs in the well-known case of the king of Siam, who rejected

the evidence of the Dutch Ambassador, for the existence of ice. His own constant experience, and that of all others, as far as he could learn, were in direct contradiction to the Ambassador's assertion. He had, therefore, as strong reason for disbelieving him, as the most constant experience could afford ; yet he was mistaken.

This evidence is, also, inferior to demonstration, if the propositions affirm the event of things in particular cases : for, as it was observed, the conclusion, which my own constant experience, and that of others, affords, respecting these events, is, that they happen according to some established law of nature. Now, the laws of nature depend upon the will of God. But, we cannot be certain, that it is his will, that they should always continue the same. He may have been willing to suspend them on certain occasions, where it seemed fit, to his infinite wisdom. He may even determine that they shall be totally changed or abolished.\* Hence, we cannot be certain, that events, which depend on these laws, will always continue the same. Consequently, the evidence, which

\* No proposition, founded on constant experience, can be better established, than that the sun will rise to-morrow : yet, he who believes in Revelation, must admit that a day will come when even this proposition will be false.

we have for these events, is inferior to demonstration.

It should be remembered, that the will of God is both the foundation of the conclusions deduced from constant experience, and the limit to them. As it secures their truth against the effects of human caprice, and other contingencies ; so it excludes their truth in all cases, in which it may be his will, that the events should be contradictory to experience.

As personal observation, when it coincides with the accounts which we have received of the experience of others, confirms them ; so, when it is contradictory to them, it lessens their weight ; because, it then induces a belief, that what has been delivered on the subject, is only a popular error. And, as such errors have prevailed, a reasonable suspicion of fallacy may be entertained on the point in question. Such a suspicion may arise, especially, where the subject requires extraordinary skill and dexterity, or peculiar accuracy of attention to all the circumstances, under which the event is to be observed. For, then it may be presumed, that there has been some defect in these requisites in former observers. But, then, it is necessary, that the person, who thus relies on his own experience, in opposition to general opinion, should be satisfied, that he possesses these qualities in an extraordinary degree, and has properly

exercised them : otherwise, he ought rather to suppose, that there has been some error in his experiments.

In some cases, personal experience would lead to false conclusions, which could be corrected only by the experience of others. Thus were we to conclude, that what we had observed in the manners, opinions, and characters of men, were general truths, depending on some permanent cause, our conclusion would be erroneous. For men have differed much in all these respects, in consequence of the various circumstances in which they have been placed. But, these differences we learn, not from our own experience, but from the experience of others : and thus, their experience shows, that what we might conclude to be uniform, was really various. On the other hand, there are facts, which would, on personal observation, appear to us to be various ; but which the experience of others would show us to be uniform. Of this nature are comets, which appear at too distant periods for any individual, unacquainted with the observations of others, to determine to be uniform. Eclipses, also, would scarcely be discovered to be uniform by the insulated observations of an individual ; and, indeed, history furnishes us with instances of even nations who were ignorant of their uniformity. Thus, we are told that the Lydians and Medes

were induced to put an end to a war, which had lasted five years, by an eclipse of the sun, which happened while they were engaged in a doubtful battle; evidently from an ignorance of the uniformity of eclipses, and, probably, supposing that this eclipse manifested the anger of the gods against their contests. And the inhabitants of Jamaica were, by a similar ignorance, prevailed upon to renew their supplies to Columbus, by his foretelling a total eclipse of the moon, with the time when it would happen, and which he pretended was a mark of the vengeance of the Great Spirit against them, for refusing to support his servants.

General Notoriety, is a fourth kind of moral evidence.\*

\* A remarkable instance of the weight of the evidence of general notoriety, even where prejudice, and interest, and authority, are all united against it, appears in the case of the Jewish Sanhedrim, relative to the healing of the impotent man, by Peter and John. All their prejudice, and all their malice, and all their power, as the highest ecclesiastical court in the nation, could not furnish to them sufficient effrontery to deny the miracle; though their language intimates that, if possible, they would gladly have done it. And yet what prevented? The *notoriety of the miracle*, and this alone: ‘*A notable miracle hath, indeed, been done by them, which is manifest to all them which dwell in Jerusalem.*’ Thus we see that the truth of the Christian religion may be shown, even to moral certainty; and this, upon the mere general notoriety of miracles wrought in its confirmation.—ED.



When we find that a thing is fully believed by all men, as far as we can learn, it is then said to be a matter of general notoriety. This kind of evidence relates both to specific facts, and to conclusions drawn from observation. It agrees with testimony, inasmuch as the information is received from others; but it differs from it, because we have not here the evidence of any particular individual, who pretends, that he himself personally observed the fact. And, it differs from general observation, because our informers do not pretend, that they deduced the conclusion from their own observations.

Most men have no other evidence than this, for a great, perhaps the greater, part of the facts and general truths, which they believe. They have neither observed those facts themselves, nor have they received them on the testimony of those who did observe them. But, they believe them, because they find them generally believed, and disputed by none. So, also, as to the general conclusions, which they hold. They have neither deduced them by their own observation, nor have they been informed of them by those, who did deduce them; but they find them universally maintained, and never doubted; therefore, they also admit them. Even truths, capable of demonstration, are received by a great part of mankind, on no higher evidence



than this. For they have neither demonstrated them themselves, nor been informed of them by those who have ; but they admit them because they are universally received.

The weight of this species of evidence, depends partly on a presumption, that if the assertions were not true, they would not be universally believed, but would be contradicted ; and partly, perhaps principally, on experience ; for, though we are in the constant practice of believing them, and acting upon them as true, we have seldom found ourselves mistaken.

A fifth kind of moral evidence, is *Report*.

The word has various significations, which it is not necessary to mention. It is here used to signify a rumour, or account of certain facts or events, more or less believed. If the account be fully credited, it then belongs to the article last mentioned. We are here not only without the testimony of any individual who professes to have observed the fact in question, himself ; but we do not even know the channel through which the information came ; for, if this be known, it is not a subject of mere report ; but of remote testimony. The weight of this species of evidence is much less, than of either of the preceding.\*

\* According to the sense in which our author uses the term 'Report,' scriptural Christianity rests in no

It depends, partly, on a presumption, that if there were not some ground for the report, it would not have arisen; and partly on experience, which points out the circumstances, that render it more or less credible. These circumstances will be more conveniently mentioned in a subsequent chapter.

*Tradition*, is a sixth kind of moral evidence.

It is the relation of a fact or event, which happened some time ago, and which was not committed to writing by any person who observed it, but was communicated from one to another, for a certain period of time. To this is to be attributed almost all the information, which we have of the history of nations in their infancy; and our knowledge of many circumstances belonging to particular persons, or particular places, which are not recorded in history. But, the tendency of mankind to exaggerate, and to supply the defects of memory by invention, render accounts so handed down, very uncertain.

degree upon it. Christians, in all ages, to the end of the world, may, with the scriptures in their hands, and with the evidence of their genuineness which we possess, adopt the language of the apostle to the Hebrews, as theirs, and say, that the gospel they hold was 'confirmed to us by them who heard' the Lord Jesus himself: i. e. their faith rests on the unquestionable TESTIMONY of eye and ear witnesses, and not on 'Report' and far less on Tradition.—ED.

All the above kinds of moral evidence may be considered as *external*; because the evidence on which the proposed subject is believed, does not arise from the subject itself, but from some external source. Besides these, there are other kinds, which, as they arise from the subjects themselves, may be considered as *internal* evidence.

The first of these is *analogy*. This is when, from the resemblance, which the subject in question bears to some other known subject, it is inferred, that they both had the same origin;\* or both possess similar prop-

\* It is from analogy, in part, that we deduce the proof of the apostle Paul's position that 'all Scripture is given by inspiration of God,' for, supposing the proof of the genuineness of the Pentateuch, as the work of Moses, to be complete, and also, that of his moral honesty, his own declarations, in that book, prove him to have been *INSPIRED*, for he repeatedly records the declaration 'Thus saith the Lord;' and with scarcely less frequency the command to *write* what was enjoined him. Now, if the Pentateuch be inspired, analogy presents the proof that the other scriptures are inspired also, from the similarity which one portion of the sacred volume bears to another, on all essential points; as, the nature of God, the principles of his government, the perfection of his laws, the condition of man, the medium of salvation, the final states of men, &c., &c. Here are no conflicting statements; no contradictory revelations; but, on all these, and many other kindred subjects, the inspired writers are truly *ONE* in their exhibitions. Analogy, then, infers that they were all under the guidance of one Spirit; and that Spirit, the same which dictated, to Moses, the Pentateuch. The

erties ; or, under similar circumstances, are likely to be affected in the same way ; or to produce the same effects. It is by this species of evidence that we are able to apply to particular occasions, the greater part of the information, which we have derived from personal observation, and the general observation of mankind. Thus, it is from the resemblance which a disorder, in a certain patient, bears in its symptoms to other disorders, which a physician has already observed, that he is able to ascertain its nature, and prescribe for its cure.

The weight of the evidence by analogy, admits of great variety, according to the particular nature of the subject, to which it is applied : and in every particular class of subjects, that weight must be determined by experience. For, experience will teach us, with what degree of safety, conclusions have been drawn in each class ; and therefore, with what degree of probability they may be drawn in future. It should be, however, observed, that reasoning by analogy, is not as safe in

triumphant, and unanswerable argument of Dryden is analogical :

‘ Whence, but from heaven, could men, unskilled in arts,  
In different ages born, — in different parts,  
Weave such agreeing truths ? or how, or why,  
Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie ?  
Unask’d their pains ; — ungrateful their advice ; —  
Starving their gains ; — and martyrdom their price.’ — Ed.

drawing general conclusions, as in applying, to particular cases, the general truths already established.

*Probable inferences, drawn from facts, or from premises,* belong also to the head of internal evidence.

Inferences from facts are termed by lawyers, *presumptions*; and are opposed by them to *positive proofs*.\* These inferences are of greater or less weight, according as it is more or less probable, that the facts or circumstances, already established, would not have existed, unless the fact, which is inferred from them, had existed also.†

\* By positive proof is meant the evidence of testimony of men on oath, or of writings, or records. A just rule of law respecting presumptions is that they are to be relied upon only until the contrary be proved. Blackstone, iii. 371.

† In Gilbert's Law of Evidence, it is said, that 'when the fact itself cannot be proved, that which comes nearest to the proof of the fact, is the proof of the circumstances that necessarily, and usually attend such facts.' But, it should seem, that what affords a safe ground to infer the fact, is, not that, if the fact did exist, it would have been attended by such or such circumstances; but, that those circumstances would not have existed, unless the particular fact alleged had existed also. For, as there may be several different facts, which would be attended by the same circumstances, the existence of the circumstances affords no ground to conclude which of those facts did actually exist. Just as, when a certain effect might be produced by several different causes, we have no ground to infer by which of



Thus, if on a remote island, a hovel should be discovered, it would naturally be inferred, that some human being had been there ; and this inference would amount to a moral certainty.\* Or, if a man be found dead in a house, with a bleeding wound, apparently made with a sword, and another man be observed running out of the house with a bloody sword in his hand, there being no other person found on the spot, a violent presumption would arise, that the fugitive was the murderer. For, though it be possible, that the deceased may have killed himself, yet, the hasty flight of this man, with the bloody weapon in his hand, are circumstances which give the inference considerable probability.

those causes it was in reality produced. But, when there is only one cause which could have produced the effect, there we may safely infer the existence of the cause from that of the effect.

\* When the philosopher, Aristippus, who was cast away upon an unknown shore, beheld certain geometrical figures distinctly marked upon the sand, he was naturally led to conclude, with a degree of confidence not inferior to moral certainty, that the country was inhabited by men, some of whom were devoted to mathematical science. Now, had these figures been less accurately formed, and more like the work of chance, the presumption, that the country was inhabited, would have been weaker ; and had they been of such a nature, as to leave it doubtful, whether they were the work of accident or design, the evidence would have been too ambiguous to serve as a foundation for any opinion.



So, also, a receipt for rent, due at a certain time, affords a probable presumption, that the rents, which were due previous to that time, had been paid. Thus, also, attempts to conceal, afford a presumption of guilt, and, on the contrary, openness\* affords a presumption of innocence.

Inferences from facts are deduced by anal-

\* How irresistible a presumption in favour of the reality of our Lord's resurrection is presented in the openness of the assertion made by his apostles that he was risen ! They were charged, on common report, with having stolen the body : now, on the principle laid down by our author, had they been guilty they would have concealed themselves, and said nothing on the subject of the resurrection, at least, for the time. They would moreover have left Jerusalem, if not Judea ; and have endeavoured to obtain proselytes to the new faith in some remote and obscure place ; till, encouraged by numbers and the antiquity of the delusion, they might venture to hope either that no opposition would be attempted when it should be promulgated in Jerusalem, or that they had influence or authority sufficient to stifle it. On the contrary, they never left the city, till the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost ; nor even then ; though, very shortly, the storm of persecution beat fiercely upon them ; Acts 8 : 1, and so open were they in their assertion of the resurrection of their Lord ; and so certain that the fact was known to the rulers, that not only in Jerusalem, but in the very temple, and before the Sanhedrim, they directly charge his murder on the rulers, and declare the fact of his resurrection. Impostors would not have done thus ; and the fact that *they* did so, affords strong presumption both of their innocence, and of the truth of what they asserted, viz : ' that God had raised him [Jesus] from the dead.' Acts 2 : 24, 32.

— ED.

ogy. For, the presumption is founded on the resemblance which the fact in question bears, in its circumstances, to other known facts.

Tables, showing the probabilities of the duration of human life, are deductions from facts ; and the application of these tables to the assurance of lives, or the purchase of annuities, are probable inferences, drawn from the general truths laid down in them.

So, also, the doctrine of chances consists of inferences from facts. That a die, for instance, has a certain number of sides, is a fact ; and that each side is as likely to come upwards, on being thrown, as any other, may be safely assumed. But the calculations of the chances of throwing an ace, or any other number, in one or more throws, are only probable inferences, drawn from these premises.

But, as these subjects belong to the science of mathematics, rather than to that of general reasoning on matters of fact, it will be sufficient just to have mentioned them here.

Of inferences from premises, it should be observed, that when they are intuitive and necessary, they belong to demonstration ; but, if they be only probable, they belong to moral evidence.

Our conclusions from premises are safe, only when, and so far as, we have a clear and certain knowledge of the connexion or repugnance of their subjects and predicates.

I say, only *so far as* we have this knowledge, because we may sometimes know that the subject and predicate are connected, but be ignorant of the nature and extent of that connexion; and consequently we cannot safely draw a conclusion respecting its nature or extent. But, as this subject properly belongs to logic, and has been fully discussed by logicians, it will not be necessary to enlarge upon it here.

Under the head of internal evidence, may, also, be mentioned the consistency of the parts of any relation of facts with each other; the appearances of simplicity, or of art and contrivance, with which the relation is delivered; the candor or partiality, which appears in the relation; the affording a fair opportunity\* of detection of what might be false or erroneous; or the studiously avoiding detec-

\* In commanding his disciples to commence the labour of evangelizing the world, at Jerusalem, our Lord Jesus afforded to his enemies every advantage they could desire, as it respects facility to refute the apostles if they asserted falsehood. They declared Christ to have risen, *in the very city, where it took place; within a few days of the event; and before the very persons* who were most intensely concerned to disprove it, if it never occurred, and could have easily done so; and, moreover, would have done so had it been in their power: for, to disprove this alleged fact, would repel the charge of bloodguiltiness laid against them, and prove that they had only lawfully condemned to death one who was proved an impostor by the falsification of his predictions that he would rise from the dead. — ED.

tion, by an attempt to render the standard of truth,\* upon the question, uncertain.

The weight of evidence arising from these circumstances, depends on experience. For, it is by experience that we discover how far a person may have observed, correctly, some part of a fact, and incorrectly another part ; or what illusions of imagination he may have been subject to, during the progress of the event, which he relates. It is, also, by experience, that we discover how far true relations usually differ from those that are false, in the other circumstances just mentioned.

Upon the whole, it appears, that the two principal kinds of moral evidence, are Experience and Testimony ; that the rest (except inferences from premises) are only combinations, or modifications of these ; and that the sphere of experience is greatly enlarged by testimony ; while, on the other hand, testimony is restricted and confirmed by experience.

\* The apostles in their labours to establish Christianity were open as daylight ; and appealed to a standard of truth, the authenticated copies of which were in the possession of their enemies. They preached first to Jews ; and, in all their addresses to them, appeal to the writings of their own prophets. They assume the certainty of this standard, — one which their opponents also admitted ; and the openness, the frequency, the invariableness of this appeal (so entirely the reverse of an attempt to render the standard of truth uncertain, or to establish another standard) affords the most satisfactory, internal evidence of their honesty, and of the truth of their doctrines. — ED.

## CHAPTER III.

GENERAL DIRECTIONS RELATING TO MORAL  
REASONING.

MOST of the directions, here proposed, will be found perfectly obvious; and therefore may be thought superfluous. But, obvious as they may be, to all who duly consider the subject, they are rarely attended to in practice. And this is one reason why errors in judgment are so frequent. As they are, probably, no where collected into one point of view, for the assistance of the student, they are here brought together for his use. It is to be wished, that in deciding on questions he would form a habit of reducing them to practice. Some of them will appear not to relate immediately to moral evidence, as defined above. But, as the general questions to which they refer are most frequently of a mixed nature, involving in them matters of fact, or general truths deduced from observation, as well as subjects of law, morality, or of some other art or science, and therefore require a knowledge of moral evidence to their decision, it was thought useful to introduce them.

The directions here proposed, may be more easily remembered, if they be collected under separate heads, and methodically arranged. They shall be mentioned, therefore, in the following order, viz : First, those which may be considered as a sort of previous qualifications for the examination of questions in moral evidence. Secondly, those which should determine whether or not we ought to engage in the discussion of the question proposed. Thirdly, such as must be observed in the discussion of questions. And lastly, the principles on which the weight of any probable argument, or the probability of any event, ought to be determined.

First. To qualify ourselves for the examination of questions in moral evidence.

1. We must acquire fixed principles of evidence, and learn to apply them as steadily, and impartially, as possible. To this end we must acquaint ourselves with the sort of evidence, of which different subjects admit ; and form settled and steady notions of the weight of the different kinds of evidence, and of the circumstances which contribute to weaken or confirm them. Thus, we shall engage in the discussion of subjects, with less danger of being biassed by interest, and, therefore, with greater probability of deciding justly. Nothing, perhaps, has contributed more to the impartiality with which justice is administered



in our courts, than their having an established law of evidence, in which is laid down what evidence shall be admitted, and what rejected. In private discussion, little progress seems to have been made towards this important object. Hence, we see men attributing great weight to evidence in their favour, but very little weight to the same kind and degree of evidence, in opposition to them. Thus, disputants are like fraudulent tradesmen, who have two sets of weights, one to be employed in their purchases, and the other in their sales.

2. We should acquire a habit of examining, at the commencement of every discussion, whether there be not some general principle, or some standard, by which the question must be determined. If there be, the discovery of it, will both direct our investigation, and conduct us most speedily, and most securely to our decision. But, if we neglect to discover it, we shall wander in our inquiry without an object, and, after all, seldom arrive at a just conclusion. For instance, to determine whether a war were or were not successful, it should be ascertained at the outset, what constitutes a war successful. So also in deciding on the characters of men in any station of life, we should previously ascertain what are the duties of their station; and what are the qualities in which excellency or defect in that line consists. A clear view

of these duties and qualities is also requisite to enable us to decide, whether a man be or be not fit for a certain employment. We must, however, be careful that the general principle which we assume, be both true in itself, and also, applicable to the point in hand ; and, to ascertain this, we should accustom ourselves to bring it forth to view, and to submit it to examination. This direction is the more necessary, because it is probable, that our decisions are often made upon latent principles, which if we were to examine, we should not suffer them to influence our determination.

3. We should acquire a habit of referring every thing, which will admit of it, to its end ; and of determining its value by its subserviency thereto. This will afford a just standard on a subject, which would, otherwise, admit of none.

Thus, in ascertaining what is the best style of writing, it should be considered, that the end of writing is to communicate ideas to the reader ; and therefore, that that must be the best style, which conveys them to him with the greatest clearness and force : compared with these qualities, ornament and dignity are but of little value. But, what that style is, which is most clear and forcible, must be decided by experience. If this rule be neglected, decisions of questions of this kind, will

be left at the mercy of fashion and caprice, and therefore, be generally erroneous.

4. We must acquire clear and precise rules of judgment ; such as are capable of an easy application, and lead as nearly as possible to certainty ; for they are valuable only as they possess these qualities. Rules, apparently precise, are often rendered vague, by some circumstance annexed to them, or by the introduction of indefinite limitations or extensions. Thus, the rule, that the dealings of men with each other should be regulated by principles of equity, is both clear and precise in itself, and admits of an easy and tolerably certain application ; because the value of either property, or of services, may generally be estimated. But, if a provision be annexed to it, that one of the parties is to have rather the advantage, or according to the common phrase, to have the turn of the scale in his favour, it then becomes indefinite, and very uncertain in its application. For, there is then nothing to direct the judgment, as to the degree in which the advantage is to be allowed, or how great a weight is to turn the scale.

Such rules are generally worse than none ; because they induce men to attempt to decide by principles which cannot lead to a just decision. If they had no rule, they would either not attempt to decide at all, or would seek after some just principle, on which to ground

their decision ; but having, what appears to be a rule, they proceed to decide, and are deceived.

Secondly. To determine whether we ought to engage in the discussion of a question.

1. We should consider whether the question be worth investigating ; and, to decide this, we should inquire of what importance\* the subject may be to us. Some subjects are important in themselves, or of importance to other men, while to us they may be of little consequence. Thus, many subjects in law or physic, may be of great moment to lawyers or physicians, but of little use to a divine,

\* Few persons, comparatively, enter on the study of the evidence by which the Christian religion is established, because there is a demand made on them of effort and labour in this study. But if the above rule were regarded, if young persons would but consider that there is no subject so important as this to them ; for, that their eternal *all* is declared to rest on it, they would not leave all the study on this subject to ministers, and theological students, and receive their *dictum* in relation to it, without personal examination. They would not be willing to leave entirely to the decision of a lawyer, the title to an estate in which they were interested : they would desire to know the principles upon which his decision was formed ; and this, because it involved their personal interest. Let them, then, consider whether the question of the truth of Christianity be not worth investigating ; and we shall soon see them filling our Bible Classes ; and by their earnest, pertinent, and modest inquiries, leading even our ministers to a review of this subject, lest they should be at a loss to reply to them. — ED.

a soldier, or a mechanic. And, should they employ in their investigation, the time which is requisite to form a just judgment of them, they must neglect what belongs to their own station. But such subjects as belong to our peculiar line of life, or to our moral and religious conduct, or health and happiness, are important to us; and therefore, are worthy of our careful examination.

2. Consider how far the question will admit of being fully examined. Some subjects can scarcely be openly and fully discussed. The questions are already decided in the opinion of mankind, and their interest and prejudice forbid their examination. Arguments on one side, however weak, will be received with applause, while those on the other, however strong, will be heard with disgust. Thus, in a republic, arguments in favour of a monarchy, or in a monarchy, arguments in favour of a republic, will scarcely be duly examined. So also, when the current of popular opinion is in favour of war, arguments for peace will excite resentment; or, when public animosities prevail, arguments in favour of the objects of general hatred will expose him who urges them to great odium.

On such questions we should be extremely careful to divest ourselves of prejudice on either side. For truth does neither necessarily lie on the same side with the general



opinion, nor on the contrary side. We must, therefore, examine such questions, as fairly as possible, on the ground of their own merits. But, in most cases, we should do this privately ; for a prudent man will be well assured that the duty of his station calls him to controvert the public opinion, before he exposes himself to the hatred of mankind by so doing.

Sometimes the arguments which are necessary to the decision of a question, cannot be urged, without a violation of the respect due to persons in authority ; or without offending the person with whom we are discoursing, on account of the reflections which they must cast upon his conduct. Prudence must direct, whether the importance of the occasion will justify our incurring these evils or inconveniences ; or, whether it be not better to avoid the discussion altogether. For, it is evident, that if these arguments be not either urged at all, or not with due force, we cannot arrive at a just decision. In our private examinations of such questions, we may, indeed, give every consideration its just weight, regardless of the discredit which it would throw on any person. This consideration, therefore, can be no reason why we should not endeavour to form our private judgment of such questions, as correctly as possible. But, it is an important reason, why we should not debate them with others ; and that, not only



on account of the evils above-mentioned, but also, lest, for want of a due consideration of the arguments necessary to a just decision, we become accessaries to their errors in judgment, and practice.

3. Consider whether the question be capable of a satisfactory decision. Some questions cannot be determined, because the subject admits of no standard, but is altogether of an arbitrary nature. Thus, matters of mere taste have, in general, no proper standard : and, therefore, according to the old adage, ‘*de gustibus nil disputandum.*’ Others admit of no decision, because the subject, or predicate of the proposition, cannot be accurately defined. And others again do not afford sufficient evidence for a determination. From all such questions, it would be better to abstain. For, besides the loss of the time devoted to them, which might be more profitably employed, their discussion has a tendency to confuse the judgment.

4. We should consider whether we are competent to the discussion of the question. Incompetency may arise from a defect of abilities, or information ; or from our being too much interested in the decision. The last is, probably, the most frequent, as well as the most powerful source of incompetency ; for nothing blinds the eyes, and perverts the judgment, so much as interest. If the ques-

tion, however, be such that, though interested in it, we are under a necessity of deciding it, we shall act prudently in taking the advice of some judicious friend, who is perfectly disinterested. At any rate, our decision should be made with diffidence ; and we should be ready to listen to any objections which may be urged against it.

Thirdly. When we have determined to enter upon the investigation, we should examine, in the first place, whether the question be fairly and clearly stated, so as to bring the real point in dispute to an issue. Sometimes, through ignorance, and often by design, the statement of a question includes something taken for granted, which necessarily leads to a decision in favour of the proposer. This amounts to begging the question ; and therefore should not be admitted. Sometimes, the true point at issue is not expressed in the question, and then the discussion, however ably conducted, leads to no satisfactory conclusion. In this case, it would be proper to adopt the practice of special pleaders, and to ascertain all the points, in which we agree with our opponent, and those in which we differ from him. A new statement of the question may then be made, in which the errors of the former may be corrected.

2. We should form as clear and precise ideas as possible of the proposition on which

we would decide ; and carefully distinguish it from all others with which it is in danger of being confounded. If it assert a fact, we should endeavour to understand clearly its nature and circumstances. This will enable us to judge more easily and correctly of the weight of the evidence, which is brought to prove it. If it affirm or deny the nature or quality of any thing, we should gain as clear ideas as possible, both of its subject and predicate, as far as we undertake to judge of it. For instance, if a certain measure of administration were asserted to be constitutional or unconstitutional, we should gain clear and precise ideas, both of the measure, and of the constitution, as far as can affect the question. For, without such clear and precise ideas, it must be impossible to form a just judgment on the subject.

3. We should consider of what kind of evidence the proposed subject, under all its circumstances, is likely to admit ; and, if such evidence be produced in sufficient degree to counterbalance all that can be fairly urged against it, we should accustom ourselves to yield our assent. This direction is important, because we are often apt to expect stronger evidence, than the nature of the thing admits ; and thence, to feel dissatisfied, though the point be fairly proved. Thus, if in studying the evidence on any question of fact, we em-

ploy ourselves in examining whether there be not a *possibility* that it may be false, instead of considering whether there be not a *sufficient probability* that it is true, we shall certainly raise strong doubts in our minds. But, then, we should not study the subject rationally.\* Demonstration is the only species of reasoning, which, if even conducted correctly, can exclude the possibility of error. But facts do not admit of demonstration. They admit of moral evidence alone. The examining, therefore, into the *possibility* of error is inconsistent with the nature of the subject, and an absurd practice.

4. Since in most questions in moral evidence there are, as has been already observed, arguments on both sides, a view must be taken of all the material arguments on each side, before we proceed to a decision; and this must be done with as much impartiality as possible. For, it is evident, that if we examine one side with a prejudice in its favour, and the other with a prejudice against it, our decision is not likely to be correct.

5. When the question to be decided is

\* Infidels and skeptics are thus irrational. They must have *demonstration* on moral subjects (which is impossible) or they will not believe: i. e. they demand impossibilities, and yet claim the reputation of reasoners and philosophers! How justly applicable to them is the language of the apostle, Rom. 1: 22. — Ed.

contained in any composition or treatise, or if we debate it with another person, we should be upon our guard against the fascinations of expression. We are apt to be too much influenced by elegance of language, or brilliancy of imagination.\* But, error is as often adorned with the flowers of rhetoric as truth. To judge correctly, we must divest every argument of all its ornaments of style, and place it before us in a plain, simple dress ; for, then we shall be better able to estimate its real weight.

6. Whenever the weight of an argument, or the decision of a question depends on *degrees*, we should examine whether those de-

\* We can scarcely too much admire the cool and unimpassioned manner in which the inspired writers record facts which are fundamental in the system of Christianity. In the poetry of the sacred volume there are some of the boldest flights of the muse, anywhere to be met with ; and in its narratives we cannot but admire the chasteness and elegance which guide the pen ; but never do the inspired writers suffer themselves to work on the sensibilities of their readers, or make exhibitions of their own in their narratives. Even the record of the trial, condemnation, and crucifixion of Jesus is a mere record of the facts ; and that, in language which might have been transmitted to Rome, as the State record of the official doings of the Procurator. Neither do the sacred writers utter a single invective, even against the traitor, Judas ; but make a simple record of his doings, and leave the deeds themselves to awaken indignation against him. *So safe* are we from being influenced, in our belief of Christianity, by flowers of rhetoric, instead of the force of truth ! — ED.



grees be fairly stated ; and, we should examine this carefully ; because their statement is too frequently fallacious. Thus, in questions respecting the comparative merit, or demerit of parties, whether public or private, the degree of virtue or vice is generally over-rated on one side, and under-rated on the other, according to the party espoused by the speaker.

7. It should be remembered, that the *probability*, and not the *possibility*, of an event is the proper ground for our conclusions. The propriety of this rule is too obvious to need proof. It has been, however, and is, too often disregarded ; as, when the prospect of a large prize in a lottery induces men to adventure, without a regard to the probability of success ; or, the fear of an injury induces them to painful precautions, without considering the probability of its happening. An instance of this kind is mentioned in the Port Royal Art of Thinking, of a princess, who, having heard that some persons had been killed by the fall of a roof, would never afterwards enter a house, without having it examined ; and was so persuaded of the propriety of her conduct, that she deemed all those imprudent, who did not take the same precaution. This rule is also disregarded by those who offer to us possibilities, as sufficient answers to arguments of probability ; a practice which is very common.

It is of great importance, both to the ad-



vancement of our knowledge, and to the happiness of our lives, to acquire a habit of disregarding, to a considerable degree, possibilities, and of forming our judgment, and regulating our hopes and fears, by the true probability of the case. In some men, hope seems naturally to prevail, in others fear. The former are apt to magnify a slight prospect of success into a strong probability; and the latter to increase too much the probability of dangers. The one dignify their rashness, by calling it a trust in providence: the others justify their timidity by naming it prudence. But, both of these dispositions need correction, and both are capable of being regulated by a due attention to the principles of moral evidence. Notwithstanding this rule, when the event, if it should take place, is of vast importance; and the line of conduct necessary to insure our safety, if it should happen, will be attended with no disadvantage, if it should not; there its possibility may properly determine our conduct. Thus, for instance, if a house be on fire, its inhabitants should endeavour to effect their escape, even though there should be the greatest probability of their failing. Because, if they succeed, they save their lives; but, if they fail, they suffer only what they would have suffered, had they made no attempt to escape; and the smallest chance of success imaginable, is surely worth

the pains and labour of the attempt. So also, the eternal judgment is an event of infinite importance. He, whose conformity to the directions of scripture, will insure his safety, if it should take place, will be no loser by that conformity, if it should not. Consequently, the very possibility of an eternal judgment, is a sufficient reason to engage in a preparation for it. This, however, is no exception to the rule, because, here the person is not supposed to draw any conclusion about the truth of the event. Decisions of questions of this kind, should proceed on a consideration of the importance of the event and its probability combined, according to a principle explained at the end of this chapter.

8. It must be observed, that the force of proof does not depend upon the number of arguments on either side, but upon their weight. For, as in an account, there may be a number of articles, which amount only to a small sum altogether; while there may be a single article, which greatly exceeds them in value; so, a number of arguments may altogether weigh but little, while one single argument may be of great weight.

9. When all the arguments on both sides have been fairly stated and examined, a judgment should be formed of the weight of each. Each side should then be summed up, and a balance struck; and our decision should be

on that side, on which the evidence preponderates. The necessity of attending to this rule is obvious. It is, however, often neglected. The more usual practice is to consider the arguments on one side only. Often, men decide on the consideration of only one single argument on one side. Whence the frequency of error is not surprising.

10. If, upon examination, the evidence on both sides should appear equal, our judgment should be suspended; but, if the evidence preponderates at all on either side, the assent must follow that preponderancy, and must also be regulated by the degree of it. As the degrees of preponderancy may vary almost infinitely, so the degrees of assent may vary almost infinitely too, as has been already mentioned. If due care be taken to proportion, the degree of assent to the degree of preponderancy, it will prevent the errors, which would otherwise arise from precipitancy of judgment. Because, then, whenever any opinion is held on slight evidence, it will be held subject to further examination, and will be corrected, if further evidence on the subject can be obtained. Besides, the person who so holds it, will probably be careful to express himself to others in such terms, as will convey to them a just idea of the degree of evidence, on which he has formed it.

Fourthly. To determine the weight of any

single argument, or the probability of any event.

The chief difficulty consists in affixing a just value to each single argument; but, if this be not done, it will be impossible to sum up each side fairly, and of course impossible to strike a just balance. It may be thought impracticable to lay down any rules for the performance of this. And, indeed, no rules can be given, which will enable us to do it with certainty in any particular case; otherwise, moral evidence would admit of certainty, as well as demonstration. But, if certainty cannot be obtained, it should be approximated as nearly as possible; and, for this purpose, we should avail ourselves of such directions, as will render us some assistance; though they be not capable of affording us all the help which we could wish. Now, the directions for determining the probability of any event, or of any simple question, on which there is only one argument on each side, will be found applicable to the determination of the probability of single arguments in more complex questions. Such directions shall, therefore, be proposed.

To determine the probability of an event, it should be considered, not nakedly, or by itself, but in all its circumstances. If all these circumstances be such as either never, or very seldom, have accompanied a falsehood, the

event is to be regarded as probable ; but, if they be such as have usually accompanied a falsehood, it is then to be considered as improbable. Or, that event, which, under similar circumstances, has more frequently happened than not, is probable : and that, which under similar circumstances, has more frequently failed than taken place, is improbable. Or, again, that rule of judgment on subjects of the same nature with that which is proposed, which, in most cases, where it is fairly applied, leads to a right conclusion, is a just rule of probability ; while that, which most frequently leads to a wrong conclusion, is a wrong rule. All these rules amount nearly to the same thing ; but they are given in these different forms ; because some subjects will admit of a more easy application of one, and others of another. They all require a reference to experience, to determine what is probable ; for, experience is the true criterion of probability. The more attentive we are to it in forming our judgments, the more correct they will be. And the larger our collection of experience is, whether founded on our own observation, or on that of others, the more capable shall we be of determining what is probable, and what is not.

In many cases, we are not satisfied with knowing, in general, what is probable ; but we wish, further to know, in what degree it is



probable. This knowledge is important, when a question is to be decided by a comparison of opposite probabilities, or when there are arguments on both sides. Now, to determine this, is a much more difficult thing than the former. It has, however, been done, and with sufficient accuracy, in some questions of as uncertain a nature, as any that can be proposed. Nothing, for instance, is more uncertain than the duration of the life of individuals. Yet, tables have been formed to regulate the expectation of life at different ages, and with sufficient accuracy, to enable men to venture large sums of money in the purchase or sale of annuities, and insurance of lives with success. And, probably, if similar methods were adopted, and applied with as much care to other subjects, the comparative probability of many of them might be as correctly ascertained. These tables were formed by an application to experience. For, it was by observing how many persons, out of a given number, died at each particular age, that their rules were laid down. In all cases, which admit of it, experience should be the foundation of our rules; and happily, a great part of the cases, which we have to decide, will admit of that foundation.

In consulting experience, we are to consider, not merely how the thing in question has most frequently happened; for, this will



enable us to determine only in general, that it is more probable that it will happen so, than the contrary ; but, we are to consider, *how much oftener* it has happened so, than otherwise ; for, this will teach us *in what degree* the event is probable. For instance, if I had observed only, that out of a number of persons, who had eaten of a certain fruit, more had been injured by it than not, I could then pronounce only, in general terms, that it would probably be injurious to any person who should eat of it. But, if I had observed, that only one third of the number had escaped injury, I might then conclude, that the probability of its being injurious to any one who should eat of it, would be as two to one ; or, if I had observed, that only one in a hundred had escaped injury, I might conclude, that it would be as ninety-nine to one.

Two points, however, must be attended to in forming our rules of probability from experience, in ascertaining both what is probable, and in what degree it is so.

The first is, to make our observations on as large a scale as possible. For, the more extensive the scale is, the nearer will the rules founded upon it approach to truth. Thus, if we had known of only two, or three persons, who had eaten of the fruit, we could not as safely trust to a conclusion drawn from this experience, as if we had known of ten ; nor,

if ten had been the number, could it be as safely trusted as if we had known of a hundred; nor, if it had been a hundred, as if it had been a thousand, and so on. Because, when our observation is confined to a small number, there is a greater danger of the operation of the cause being affected by unknown circumstances, than where it is larger. And, the larger the number is, it is less probable that the interfering circumstances should exist, and yet be undiscovered; and the more probable that the cause is connected with the observed effect, and regulated in its operation, by some established law of nature. Besides, where our observation is extensive, we are enabled to determine better respecting the energy of the cause; and, whether there exist more or fewer circumstances which can prevent, or interfere with its operations; and, perhaps, what those circumstances are. Thus, when the vaccine inoculation had been tried on only a few patients, though its success excited the attention of inquiring men, yet they would not presume to decide whether the disease which it occasioned were mild and safe, and whether it would secure the patient from the infection of the small pox. But, as the instances of its success multiplied, their doubts have been gradually overcome. And, now that these instances are very numerous,

their judgment of the propriety of the practice is established.

The other point to be attended to is, that the facts on which our rules are founded, have been similarly circumstanced with those to which they are to be applied. For, if this be neglected, we shall be exposed to continual errors. Thus, if an epidemical disease, which proved more fatal to persons of one age, than to those of another, raged in the city, from which tables of the expectation of life were formed; and the observations were made at the time when that disease prevailed, they would lead to false conclusions; and they, who acted on those tables, would fall into great, and perhaps ruinous mistakes. For, they would judge of the probability of the duration of human life in ordinary circumstances, by observations made in extraordinary cases.

To judge of the similarity of circumstances, it is necessary to distinguish those which may affect the event in question, from those which cannot; for the latter must be neglected, but the former carefully attended to. To make this distinction is often very difficult. For, many circumstances, which have been thought immaterial, have, upon a closer examination, and further discoveries, been found of great moment. No rule, however, but attention to experience, or engaging in a course of exper-

iments upon the circumstances, can be given, to make this distinction correctly.

Some subjects, from their nature, are more capable of being reduced to the test of experience than others. Of many, we have not sufficient opportunities of observation, to warrant a general conclusion ; or those opportunities happen at too distant periods to enable us to make a fair comparison of the events ; or the facts are involved in too intricate, or perhaps, dissimilar circumstances, to afford any deductions. We ourselves, also, are too inattentive to them while passing, and recollect them too imperfectly afterwards, to form a correct judgment of them. But, if there be any particular subjects, on the probability of which it may be peculiarly important to us to decide, we must apply ourselves to them with more than ordinary care. We must avail ourselves of every opportunity of observing them ourselves, or learning the observations upon them of others. We must not trust to memory, but carefully write down the facts, and all the material circumstances with which they were attended. We must do this from time to time, as we make our observations. Thus we shall be continually collecting materials, from which a comparison may be made, and a correct judgment formed. For example, if I were desirous of ascertaining whether men were more influenced by a prejudice in

favour of old customs, or by a love of novelty, I would write down, under separate heads, every instance of the influence of either, with which I met, either by observation, or in conversation, or in reading; and, at the same time, set down all the circumstances attending each particular case, as far as I could collect them. Or, if I wished to ascertain, whether mankind are more disposed to resist a lawful government, than submissively to endure a tyrannical one, I would collect, under separate heads, all the pertinent instances, together with their circumstances, with which I could meet. The greater part of these must necessarily be furnished from history; and therefore, in the course of my historical studies, I should continually keep in mind, that I had such a collection in hand, that I might avail myself of every instance which occurred. Many such questions might be mentioned, on which evidence should be continually collected in the same way. To so laborious practice, few, perhaps, would be willing to submit. But, it is obvious, that it would enable us to decide questions much more accurately than men usually do. For, a great many of the instances, which are necessary to be considered, in order to a right decision, have passed by them unobserved; many which were observed, are forgotten; and many are not in their recollection, when their determi-



nation is made : and thus their decision is founded on a few instances, which, from interest or passion, or some peculiar circumstances, had fixed themselves in their mind. Decisions, upon so partial a view of a question, must generally be erroneous. If questions occur, on which we have made no collections, or if we cannot bring ourselves to the practice of so laborious a method as that which has been just mentioned, we ought to recollect, as fairly and clearly as possible, all the instances of similar cases, which have come to our knowledge ; that our decisions may, as much as possible, be founded upon experience. For, thus our judgment, having something to direct it, will be left less at the mercy of our interests and affections, and, consequently, its decisions will be more likely to be correct.

Although the reasoning upon conclusions already established by moral evidence, must become more and more uncertain, the farther we proceed ; yet, as in some cases, it may be necessary, it will be proper to give some directions relative to that procedure. In doing this, we have only to relate the principles which are laid down by mathematical writers upon the doctrine of chances. They represent certainty by unity ; and every probability by a fraction, whose numerator is the number of chances of the events happening, and whose



denominator is the number, both of its happening and failing. Thus, if an event have three chances for its happening, and two of its failing, the sum of which being five, the fraction  $\frac{3}{5}$  will be the probability of its happening, and  $\frac{2}{5}$  of its failing. Or, to express the same in other words, the denominator of the fraction expresses the whole number of the events observed, and the numerator the number observed to happen in a particular way.

To render this more easy to persons who have never studied mathematics, or the higher parts of arithmetic ; suppose that out of 100 persons, who had been known to eat of a certain fruit, 75 had been injured by it ; then the probability of its being injurious to any person who was going to eat of it, would be expressed by the fraction  $\frac{75}{100}$ , which, being reduced to its lowest terms, is  $\frac{3}{4}$  ; consequently, the probability of safety in eating of it is  $\frac{1}{4}$ . This is the method of proceeding in a question, consisting of only one step. But, if a second step be necessary, then the same process must be repeated to ascertain its probability, considered independently ; and, after that, both steps are to be combined by multiplying together the fractions so found, for the second conclusion. Thus, suppose as before, 75 out of the 100 had been injured by eating of the fruit ; and that out of every 10, who

had been injured by it, 4 had died ; then, to discover what probability of death there was in eating of it, I must multiply  $\frac{75}{100}$ , or rather  $\frac{3}{4}$  into  $\frac{4}{10}$ , which will give  $\frac{12}{10}$ , which is equal to  $\frac{3}{10}$ . Hence the probability of surviving the eating of it, will be expressed by  $\frac{7}{10}$ . In the same way we proceed for every other conclusion, always ascertaining the fraction, expressive of the probability of the given step independently, and then multiplying that fraction into the conclusion last established, for the next conclusion.\*

Sometimes, without entering into a particular examination of a question, a tolerable judgment may be formed of it from a general view of the fairness or unfairness with which it is treated. This general view, however, will not warrant a high degree of assent ; both because we may be mistaken in the appear-

\* An apology may, perhaps, be necessary for introducing numerical calculations into a work of this nature, and proposing them as examples of the mode of reasoning on topics of moral evidence. But, if the accuracy of numbers be not attainable on the particular subject of our inquiry, the general plan here given must be pursued, if we would arrive at a just conclusion. And, as this plan admits of being described both more clearly, and more correctly, by means of numbers, than by general terms, they afford the best standard for our practice. Indeed, such is the vagueness of language on subjects of this nature, that terms can scarcely be found to describe the mode of proceeding with sufficient accuracy, and clearness, to afford any direction, capable of being reduced to practice.

ances ; and because a point which is really true, may be treated unfairly, through want of skill in those who maintain it, or from the influence of a bad habit ; but it may, notwithstanding, afford a considerable degree of probability. The principles on which this probability depends, are as follows : first, that truth is always consistent with itself ; i. e. that one truth harmonizes with others ; and that, in order to its establishment, it can never be necessary, that any just principle of evidence, knowledge, or morality, should be set aside, or perverted ; and consequently, that no unfair practices can be requisite to maintain it. And, secondly, our experience, that when men maintain a cause, which they are conscious is just, they are desirous that it should evidently appear so to be ; and, that this desire is so strong, that it always influences their conduct, except when it is prevented by some powerful motive to the contrary ; and, on the other hand, that when they are conscious that their cause is unjust, they naturally shrink from fair examination. So constant is this experience, that it has become proverbial that openness is an evidence of innocence,\* and secrecy, or a desire of concealment, an evidence of guilt. There are, indeed, some affairs of a nature so entirely private, involving only the interests

\* See Note on page 107.

of the agent himself, or his particular connexions, that nobody else has any right to be acquainted with them. In these, every man is at liberty to be as secret as he pleases; and his secrecy affords no evidence of guilt. But, in all other cases, the argument from experience is well founded. For, experience shews, that an honest man is impatient of suspicion, and in order to free himself from it, will do all in his power to bring the cause which he maintains, into as clear a light as possible.

One part of moral evidence relates to the truth or falsehood of propositions: another respects things, as whether they are good or bad, eligible or ineligible; or, when two things are proposed to our choice, which of them should be preferred. But, as when we speak of them, we make propositions respecting them, this latter part resolves itself into the former. Its importance, however, renders it worthy of a separate discussion; and, indeed, some points in it require particular directions.

To determine whether a thing proposed be good or bad, eligible or ineligible, we must state all its advantages on the one side, and all its disadvantages on the other; and decide according to the preponderancy of the former, or the latter. The necessity of this arises from the mixed nature of things; there being scarcely any thing entirely good, or entirely

bad ; entirely beneficial, or entirely prejudicial. Hence, if we consider only one side of the thing proposed, we cannot possibly form a correct judgment, or a judicious choice.

In estimating advantages and disadvantages, we must not confine our views to those which are immediate, but extend them to more remote and general consequences ; and take care not to over-rate those which are near, and under-rate those which are distant. For, immediate benefits are often productive of remote and general evils, and immediate disadvantages of remote and general benefits. Our choice, therefore, lies frequently, perhaps generally, between our present interest, which is comparatively small, and of short duration, and our future, but extensive good. Thus, youth cannot be well educated without a degree of study, which is, at the time, extremely painful, and to which, if left to their own choice, they would scarcely ever submit. Wealth can rarely be acquired without application to business, and the sacrifice of ease and pleasure. Health cannot be preserved without restraint of the passions and inclinations. Character cannot be established, without resisting the solicitations of interest. And virtue cannot be attained without opposing temptations, the compliance with which would produce immediate gratification or advantage.



Hence, virtue has been well described, as the sacrifice of the present to the future, and vice as the sacrifice of the future to the present. It is, therefore, of great importance both to happiness and virtue, to acquire a habit of considering remote and general consequences, and to allow them due influence on our judgment.

We should, also, be particularly careful that the statement of advantages and disadvantages, be correct. For, in this we are exposed to great danger of delusion; and, that the danger of that delusion is real, and not imaginary, is too evident from experience. We seldom find that things turn out in possession, what we had represented them to ourselves in prospect. The great cause of this disappointment is, that if we happen to like the thing proposed, we give too much liberty to our imaginations to exaggerate its advantages, while we suppress many of its disadvantages, and lessen others. On the other hand, if we dislike the thing, we over-rate its evils, and under-rate its benefits. Thus, our determinations are made by passion, rather than by judgment; they cannot, therefore, be expected to be prudent. So also, when other men would persuade us to the choice of any particular thing, or to engage in any undertaking, they generally over-rate its advantages, and under-rate its disadvantages, or the trouble



and expense necessary to insure success. We should, therefore, suspect the fallacies to which their statements are liable in these particulars, and examine them with the most rigid accuracy. Thus, people are often induced to engage in building upon a low estimate being given them of the expense, when they would not have engaged in it, had they known the real cost.

What has been said, relates to those advantages and disadvantages which constantly attend the subject proposed, and which, therefore, may be considered as morally certain. With respect to such as are contingent, the rule is, that we should form our expectation of them by a fair consideration of experience, and not suppose that our case will prove an exception to the general observation of mankind. The degree, in which this rule is disregarded, and the mischievous consequences arising from that disregard, show that it cannot be too strongly impressed upon our minds. We see men continually plunging themselves, and those who are under their direction, into vice and misery ; not because they are ignorant of the general experience of mankind on the point in question, but because they presume, that their case will be an exception to the general rule. Thus, men place their sons in lines of life, proverbially dissolute, or dishonest, and yet trust that they will resist

the temptations which have overcome, by far, the greater number of those who have been exposed to them.\* These are sad delusions.

\* Experience is disregarded in a similar way when men put a confidence in persons of certain lines of life, the members of which are known to have been almost universally unworthy of confidence. In these cases, also, they err, not because they are ignorant of the result of experience, but because they suppose their case to be an exception to the general rule. In defence of this disregard of experience, it is sometimes urged, that *it does not follow*, that because men in that station have been in general unworthy of confidence, the man in whom we confide is so too. But I ask, what is meant by this expression, *it does not follow*? If it mean that it is not a *probable* consequence, the assertion is not true; both because it is probable that men in similar situations, exposed to similar temptations and under similar circumstances, will be affected in the same way; and because in almost every line of life there are certain modes of action established by custom, and custom is by almost all men regarded as a law. But, if the expression mean that it is not a *certain* consequence, I answer, this is nothing to the point. For human conduct is to be regulated, not by demonstrative, but by moral evidence, which does not admit of certainty. A further defence of this disregard of experience is often grounded on the superior principles which, it is alleged, the person in whom we confide possesses beyond other men in similar situations. In deciding, however, on the existence of these superior principles, no allowance is made for the danger of delusion, arising from friendship, interest, or party: a danger which facts show to be extreme. Other men have known the general rule derived from experience as well as we. They, too, have determined their case to be an exception to it; and in making that determination they have been generally deceived. This shews that it is most probable, that we too shall be deceived

In all cases, it is most probable, that we, and those under our directions, shall experience what most others, similarly circumstanced, have experienced. This is the only principle on which we can judge with safety, and, when we disregard it, we delude ourselves, and do not make a fair use of our talents.

To determine whether it be prudent to engage in the pursuit of any proposed object, we should first consider, whether success in its pursuit be uncertain, or subject to no reasonable doubt. If that success be a moral certainty, then our decision must be made by a comparison of the importance of the object, with the trouble and expense of the pursuit.

in following their example. It is in this way that experience becomes of so little use to men in directing their conduct. I do not say, that there may not be exceptions to general rules. But I say, that we cannot be too careful in examining whether or not our case be really an exception; and that we ought to have strong, positive, direct evidence that it is so; otherwise, we are not justifiable in disregarding general rules. It is, however, observable, that when men are not influenced by interest, friendship, or party, they are rarely deluded by these pretended exceptions. Thus, few people disregard the general character of horse dealers in their transactions with them. They generally make use of all the skill which they possess, in examining the horse which they are going to purchase; and yet, after all, they are frequently deceived. But, this is not because of the confidence which they repose in them, but because the skill of the dealer in concealing the defects, exceeds their skill in detecting them.

But, if it be uncertain, then the consideration of the probability of success must be combined with that of the importance of the object, and these two together must be compared with the trouble and expense of pursuit. In general, too, another consideration is necessary. Since one object can seldom be pursued without relinquishing another, a judgment of the value of the object to be relinquished, must be formed in the same way, and the comparison of the two must direct our determination. In like manner, the value of two or more objects proposed to us, out of which one is to be chosen, may be ascertained and compared, that we may decide which is to be preferred. For instance, should a man be in doubt whether he should bring up his son to the bar, or to agriculture, he should consider, on one side, the rank and fortune which successful counsellors usually obtain; and combine this consideration with the probability of success. As this probability is very small, it reduces, very much, the value of the expectation to be reasonably entertained. From this value he should make a suitable deduction, for the expensive education for the bar. On the other side, he should consider the fortune usually acquired in farming, and should combine this fortune with the probability of success; and then make a suitable allowance for the very little expense incurred

in the education of a farmer. The superior rank of the one may be considered as an equivalent for the more agreeable occupation of the other, and therefore, both may be neglected. The result of the consideration would, perhaps, be, that the superior fortune and dignity of the one, was more than compensated by the superior probability of success, and the small expense in the other.\*

\* In subjects, which both admit and require greater accuracy, the following method may be pursued.

To determine the value of a proposal:—If the attainment of the object admit of no reasonable doubt, then from the value of the object in itself considered, we are to deduct the expense and trouble of pursuit, and the remainder is the value of the proposal. Thus, if the proposed object be worth \$1000, and the expense incurred in the pursuit, together with a reasonable compensation for trouble and loss of time be \$150, the value of the proposal is then \$850. But, if the attainment of the object be uncertain, then the probability of success must be ascertained, by a consideration of how many, out of as large a number of persons as possible, engaged in the same pursuit, and similarly circumstanced with ourselves, have succeeded. The probability thus found, must be expressed by a fraction, as before directed. That fraction must be multiplied into the value of the object. From this product, the compensation for expense, trouble, and time, must be deducted. The remainder is the value of the proposal. Thus, suppose, as before, the value of the object to be \$1000, and that three out of every four persons engaged in the pursuit, under similar circumstances with ourselves, have succeeded: then multiplying 1000 by  $\frac{3}{4}$ , it produces \$750; from which deduct, as before, \$150, and the remainder \$600 is the value of the proposal. In like manner may be ascertained, the value of an object to be relinquished; or the values of several objects proposed to us, out of which we are to choose one.



It is obvious, that all subjects do not require equal care in regulating our choice ; but, that our care should be proportioned to the importance of the subject. And, if our determination will admit of no correction, but we must abide by our choice, whether wise or foolish, we can scarcely be too attentive to the examination of the grounds on which it is made, according to the old adage, ‘*deliberandum est diu, quod semel statuendum est.*’

To regulate our judgment in the advice which we give to others, we must consider what is likely to suit their constitutions, abilities, finances, habits, feelings, taste, and other circumstances : for, as people differ much in these respects, the same advice cannot be suitable to all. The chief difficulty arises from the ideas of good and evil, which our own dispositions, habits, and circumstances, have impressed on our minds, and which are so strongly associated with their respective objects, that they can scarcely be separated. Hence, we can scarcely avoid making ourselves a standard for others ; and thus overlooking the difference of their circumstances, which should make a correspondent difference in the advice which we should give them. But, when the subject of advice has any relation to morality, no circumstances, but those



which make a part of the definition of the duty, and thus constitute an essential part of the moral nature of the subject, should make any alteration in our advice. For such immaterial circumstances as feelings, habits, &c. make no difference as to moral duty.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### SPECIAL DIRECTIONS RELATING TO EACH KIND OF MORAL EVIDENCE.

PERSONAL Observations, and the observation of others, coincide in so many particulars, that repetition will be avoided by treating of them together.

1. Consider whether you are properly qualified to ascertain, by observation, the properties of the subject proposed.

This rule is of especial importance in all such subjects, as require previous information or great skill, or a nice discernment in making the experiments. Thus, should any one, unacquainted with the elements of chemistry, the accuracy requisite in chemical experiments, or the various ways in which fallacies may arise in them, engage in a course of experi-

ments he could not safely trust to their result. Incapacity for making observations correctly, may arise from other sources besides the want of talents, or of previous information. Religious or political prejudices may also disqualify a man for a fair deduction of general conclusions from an observation of mankind. And, in general, prejudice and interest, render our observations suspicious.

This rule applies equally to the observation of others. It teaches us not to trust to their observations, unless we may presume them to have been fair and capable observers.

2. Be careful to ascertain the circumstances under which your observations were made. For the events of things depend on circumstances, and often on circumstances which might be thought incapable of influencing them. Their events, therefore, under one set of circumstances, can afford no rule for judging of them under another. Thus, in the case of the King of Siam, mentioned above, it was not considered that his observations on water were made on degrees of heat, very different from those under which the Ambassador asserted that it would be converted into ice; nor was it considered, that though, in certain latitudes, the cold might never exceed a certain degree, it could not thence be inferred, that it might not exceed it in other latitudes.

As it was remarked before, a distinction must be made between such circumstances, as can affect the event, and such as cannot; and experience alone can teach us how to make this distinction. This rule, also, is equally applicable to the observations of others.

3. Take care that your conclusions be not drawn from the observation of too small a number of subjects; or rather, that the degree of your assent to them be proportioned to the extent of the materials from which they are drawn. For, though a very few observations may warrant a conjecture, we cannot safely consider a general truth as established, without the observation of many subjects of the same kind. In this respect, however, a difference must be made in the different kinds of subjects, according as they are of a more uniform or a more various nature. For, fewer observations will warrant a general conclusion, on such subjects as minerals, earths, or vegetables, than on the effects of things on mankind. We are in too much haste to draw general conclusions, and are unwilling to wait, till we are possessed of materials, from which they may be safely drawn.

In the application of this rule to the observations of others, there is some difficulty. For we are often incapable of knowing the extent of the subjects on which their observations were made; and men are apt to speak

of them as more extensive than they were. We can overcome this difficulty only by considering their general habits of accuracy in observation, and correctness in statement. Our knowledge of these habits must be attained, either by an acquaintance with the character of the particular individual, with whose observations we are furnished ; or, by a consideration of the general character of the profession to which he belongs. For, as was remarked before, the observations of the members of some professions, are more worthy of credit than those of others.

4. In subjects which are observed to be various, we can know what event is probable, in any particular case, only by considering how it has most frequently happened. And we can ascertain the degree of that probability only, by collecting the number of cases, in which it has been observed to happen in each way ; and, taking those numbers as the ratio, which the probability of its happening in one way, bears to that of its happening in the other. But, this point has been sufficiently discussed before.

5. It is also to be remembered, that the utmost that can be accomplished in such subjects, is to ascertain, not what actually will happen in each particular case, but only what is most likely to happen ; or what may be expected, in a certain proportion, out of a

given number of cases. Hence, he who assures a single life on the most correct principles of assurance, may be a loser; while, had he assured a thousand lives on the same principles, he might have been a gainer.

A few further cautions may be given, to regulate the credit which should be given to the observations of others.

1. If they state the facts, from which they deduced their observations, we should consider whether they had sufficient ground for their conclusions; or, if they relate the processes of their experiments, we should examine how far they were likely to afford an accurate result.

2. We should consider how far the observations of others concur with our own. If they coincide, our deductions are evidently confirmed; but, if they differ, we should re-examine the ground on which we made our observations, and our ability to make them fairly; and carefully inquire, whether we or they were more likely to be mistaken.

It is a rule of evidence, that credit should be given to every man in his own profession. And, on the whole, this is a safe rule. For though erroneous opinions may be entertained by persons in most lines of life, and may be persisted in through prejudice, yet a certain degree of success does attend their judging and acting on the opinions which they hold;

whereas, were the plans of inexperienced persons, or those of speculative projectors followed, very few of them would be found to succeed at all. Thus, were farmers, instead of being disposed to follow the practice of their forefathers, ready to adopt every new plan proposed to them as an improvement, they would involve themselves in losses, and the public might be injured by a scarcity of grain. There is, however, a mean. A man should be so far ready to adopt plans of improvement, as to be willing to try them on a small scale ; but he should pursue, steadily, his old plans, till experience had sanctioned the new ones. If experienced men in any line shall have relinquished an old practice, it may be reasonably presumed, that they have done so on the authority of experience.

3. We should consider how far they, who furnished us with their observations, were likely to relate them faithfully. Here, the nature of the subject must direct us ; for, if it be connected with any party-prejudices, political, religious, or literary ; or be likely to promote any private interest, or gratify the vanity of the observer ; his fidelity in the relation is less deserving of credit, than it would otherwise be.



To regulate the credit to be given to Testimony.\*

It should be recollected, that Testimony relates to specific facts or events, and not to general conclusions, deduced from the observation of a variety of facts of the same kind ; and, that it is the evidence of a person, who declares that he himself saw or heard what he relates, and not that he was informed of it by others. To determine whether his evidence be worthy of credit at all, or how far it is so, the following particulars must be attended to.

1. It should be considered how far the thing in itself, and under its proposed circumstances, is credible or incredible.† For,

\* Several of the leading ideas on this subject, are taken from Dr. Watts's Logic, part ii. chap. v. sec. 5.

† The following illustration of our author's principle will both set his meaning in a clear light, and furnish an application of the principle to the evidence of the Divine origin of the Christian religion. Jesus several times distinctly predicted his own resurrection from the dead, as a testimony from God that he was the Messiah. (Matt. 17 : 9 and 26 : 32. Mark 9 : 9 and 14 : 28.) Now a resurrection to an endless life had never been witnessed ; and perhaps many of the Jews, (and certainly those of other nations,) had never witnessed a resurrection at all. After the event, it was declared by his apostles to have actually occurred ; but there were many before whom the testimony was borne, who, 'when they spake of the resurrection, mocked.' But upon our author's principle (and it is doubtless a correct one) this was unwise. Two in-

if it be absolutely impossible, no previous opinion of the competency and veracity of the witness, can procure belief. If what is related be possible but extremely improbable, the testimonies of a greater number of persons of unimpeachable character, together with the evidence of concurrent circumstances, are requisite to render it credible. But, if it be not improbable, the testimony of an ordinary and unsuspected witness, is sufficient to make it worthy of credit.

These are the general principles on which the credibility or incredibility of the things attested should regulate our belief in testimony. But, as this subject is of great im-

quiries here propose themselves to the consideration of these hearers ; First, Is the thing *in itself* credible ? Secondly, Is it credible under the *alleged circumstances* ? To the first, sound reason would have replied in the affirmative ; for, in the case of every living man, we see matter alive which never lived before ; how then can it be incredible that matter which has lived once should live again ? To the second also an affirmative answer would be given, for the ‘alleged circumstances’ are not, that, in the ordinary operation of natural laws, he was raised from the dead ; but that he was so raised by the special interference of Divine agency. The apostles always say this, ‘Him hath GOD RAISED UP ;’ ‘GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD.’ These, then, being the alleged circumstances, and the fact, moreover, being in itself credible, ‘Why should it be thought a thing incredible that God should raise the dead ?’ Similar remarks are applicable to other miracles ; and our author himself applies the principle before us to those of Jesus, prior to his suffering, in a following page.—ED

portance, it must be treated with greater particularity.

It should be observed, that the presumptions arising from experience, cannot be compared on equal terms with the probabilities arising from testimony, because they are not homogeneous,\* and no rule can be formed, similar to that of reduction in arithmetic, to bring them to the same denomination. In that class of subjects which has above been denominated *various*, the strongest presumptions may be overcome by the testimony of witnesses of ordinary credibility. For, as it is observed by Bishop Butler, (Analogy, part ii. chap. ii. sec. 3.) ‘There is a very strong presumption against common speculative truths, and against the most ordinary facts, before the proof of them; which yet is overcome by almost any proof. There is a presumption of millions to one against the story of Cæsar, or of any other man. For suppose a number of common facts, so and so circumstanced, of which one had no kind of proof, should happen to come into one’s thoughts, every one would, without any possible doubt, conclude them to be false. And the like may be said of a single common fact.’

The general conclusions, deduced, however, from the observation of subjects which

\* See Dr. Campbell’s Dissertation on Miracles, p. 23.

are *uniform*, cannot as easily be overcome by testimony. Thus, no man would believe that a cannon ball, thrown from a ship into the sea, floated, upon such testimony as was only sufficient to give credibility to the events of the life of a Cromwell or a Buonaparte, however surprising those events may be. Yet, even these general conclusions may be surmounted by testimony, provided the witnesses be numerous, their characters unimpeachable, the facts level to their judgment, and the circumstances under which they give their evidence, calculated to confirm it. For facts which contradict these general conclusions, ought not to be regarded as impossible. Strictly speaking, that only is impossible which involves in it an absurdity. It is only in a lower and incorrect sense, that those things are called impossibilities, which are contradictory to uniform and general experience. Thus, that a man should be able to foretel clearly and distinctly remote events, to walk upon the sea, to heal diseases by a command, to raise the dead, though they be contrary to the ordinary course of nature; yet as they involve in them no absurdity, they are not in themselves, and in the strict sense of the word, impossibilities. For the course of nature might, in these and in other respects, have been different from what it is, had it pleased the Creator that it should be so; or,

as has been already observed, it may have been suspended or altered, on particular occasions, and for important purposes. Facts of this nature, therefore, ought not to be regarded as such, as no testimony can render credible; though they certainly require extraordinary testimony, together with the evidence of concurrent circumstances, to procure belief.

Besides these, there are other facts, on which we are in danger of exercising an unreasonable incredulity. They are such as are more properly *beyond* our experience, than contradictory to it;\* being such as neither we, nor any other persons, as far as we can learn, have ever observed. Thus, if soon after the discovery of electricity, a person had travelled to a part of the world, unacquainted with that discovery, and had re-

\* When we distinguish facts as *beyond*, or *contradictory* to experience, we must mean by the term experience, the general conclusions deduced from observation. For, if we mean by it the experience of a specific fact, nothing can be contradictory to it, but what is asserted to have happened, and which we experienced not to have happened. But, understanding the word in the sense above-mentioned, that wax should not melt in fire, or lead sink in water, is *contradictory* to our experience; but, that water should never become solid, was properly *beyond* the experience of the King of Siam, and not *contradictory* to it; because he had never seen it under those circumstances in which its freezing takes place.



lated the extraordinary electrical phenomena which he had seen, his veracity would probably have been disputed ; until he had either shown some electrical experiments, or produced the testimony of several other respectable witnesses in confirmation of his assertions. However extensive our knowledge of nature may be, we cannot safely presume, that we are yet acquainted with the whole of it. As discoveries have already been made, which were altogether unlooked for by our predecessors, so farther discoveries may still be made, of which we can at present form no conception. The discovery of Galvanism is very recent. And, as it is obvious into what errors we should have run, had we on first hearing of its phenomena, pronounced them false, we should learn to be cautious in deciding, that other extraordinary facts, which are related by competent witnesses, are undeserving of credit.\* An acquaintance with philosophy will sometimes not only render credible certain phenomena, the existence

\* The fall of heavy bodies, of the appearance of stones, from the higher regions of the atmosphere, accompanied by a luminous meteor, a hissing sound, like that of large shot, and a loud explosion, has been generally discredited. But, he who reads the evidence of these facts, which has lately been collected, will scarcely withhold his assent to their truth, however dissatisfied he may be with the method of accounting for them. See *Edinburgh Review*, vol. iii. p. 386.



of which we might have disbelieved, but also enable us to account for them on natural principles, when, by superstitious people, they are regarded as miracles or portentous signs. Thus, the various appearances of terrestrial bodies in the atmosphere, as of buildings, cattle, or even armies, which by some have been regarded as prodigies, announcing the approach of awful events, and would, by most, be thought the mere illusions of the imagination, or pronounced falsehoods, have been accounted for by philosophers, by the known laws of refraction.\* Many extraordinary facts are mentioned by Bishop Douglas, in his *Criterion of Miracles*, of the influence of the mind in the occasion and cure of diseases. These facts are of such a nature, that while some would be disposed to regard them as miraculous, most men would, probably, determine them to be incredible, yet they are supported by testimony, in itself unexceptionable, and confirmed by various other similar cases, and therefore, as the Bishop observes, are worthy of credit.

On the other hand, it would be equally unsafe to admit the truth of extraordinary facts on slight and suspicious evidence. In these cases, as in most, the mean is safer than either extreme. We shall be most likely to avoid

\* See *Christian Observer*, vol. iii. p. 669.

error by requiring that the number and credit of the witnesses, together with the evidence of concurrent circumstances, should be, in some degree, proportioned to the improbability arising from the extraordinary nature of the facts attested. How we are to judge of the credit of witnesses, and of the circumstances which tend to confirm their evidence, will be inquired presently.

2. The consistency of the parts of a relation with each other, and with known circumstances, is another point to be attended to.\*

\* Strong evidence of the divine origin of revealed religion is afforded in the consistency of the histories of the inspired volume with themselves, with each other, and with known circumstances. The first five books of the Bible are the work of one man, (Moses) and the relation is very long, circumstantial, and minute; yet is it entirely consistent in all its parts with itself, so that no suspicion can arise from its perusal, that it records, as facts, events which never occurred, how wonderful soever they may be; since, with the same remarkable consistency which characterizes the general narrative, the writer refers all the miracles which he records, to special divine interference. (See note † on p. 155.) In like manner, succeeding writers pursue the narrative from near where preceding ones left it; and sometimes tacitly, at others, explicitly, testify to the authenticity of the previous records; and always, on fundamental points, write in exact consistency with each other, as, also, with the father of the history. Moreover these writings are in harmony with known circumstances; witness the existence, the ceremonies, and present state of the nation of Israel.

Thus also of the New Testament histories: We have four narratives of our Lord's life and ministry, all con-

If the relation be long, it is very difficult, if not impracticable to fabricate it so completely in all its parts as to preserve consistency. Hence consistency confirms the relation ; and if the subject be examined in this view, the deception, if any exist, will generally be detected.

3. The light which is thrown upon the subject by subsequent circumstances,\* should

sistent, all harmonious, written at different times, and, probably, each writer had seen the work of his predecessor ; yet no imputation is ever uttered of falsehood, or misrepresentation ; and all the varieties observable, are such as arose out of the circumstances of those for whose use the several narratives were primarily written ; or from a desire to supply what was deficient. Thus, John's gospel is supplemental to all the others, and yet is entirely consistent with them ; and thus, also, in relating the events connected with Christ's resurrection, each records, from his own knowledge, what might supply the lack of the others ; and the *whole testimony* is to be gained from a comparison of *all the histories*. Again, these histories and that of the Acts correspond with 'known circumstances :' viz. the existence of the Christian Church, and its ordinances, as standing monuments whose existence can only be accounted for, on the supposition of the truth of the histories. See Leslie's 'Short and Easy Method with the Deists.'--ED.

\* If we apply this rule for judging of testimony, to the declarations of the apostles that Christ arose from the dead, we shall see that their declarations were established by subsequent circumstances. They declared he was risen, their enemies asserted that they had stolen his body. If the assertion of the apostles were true, we should expect them to confront their adversaries, and repeat, boldly and constantly, their assertion ; for experience teaches us that truth is bold, persevering

also be regarded. For, when these circumstances are such, as from experience they might be expected to be, on a supposition that the fact asserted were true, they confirm the assertion; otherwise they lessen its credibility. The influence of these circumstances, both in support of the evidence of testi-

and consistent. If, on the contrary, the charge of their enemies were well founded, we should expect the apostles to avoid them; and to waive, in their discourses, the subject of their Master's resurrection; to succumb to their powerful opponents; or, at least, to blunt the edge of their accusations. We should, moreover, expect their enemies to urge home upon them the charge of violating the sacredness of the sepulchre; and, by producing the dead body, if they possessed it, to prove at once the falsehood of the assertion that he was risen, and that of his claims to the Messiahship, which he had made to rest on his resurrection. This they would be the more anxious to do, because it would effectually repel the charge of murder from them; and prove that since he was an imposter, they had only acted according to the laws in destroying him; since the blasphemer was, by the law, required to be put to death. But what were the facts of the case?—the 'subsequent circumstances?' We find the apostles in the city, in the *temple*, and BEFORE THE COUNCIL, asserting the resurrection of their master without contradiction by their adversaries:—we find them directly charging, not common murder, but, *the murder of God's anointed* (Acts 7: 52) on their rulers, and these rulers taking no measures to disprove the charge, but only to silence those who made it;—and we see the reiterated declaration that 'Christ was risen' made before the very persons who accused those who made it, of having stolen the body; and these persons never daring to attempt their conviction. Who can resist the evidence these 'circumstances' afford of the reality of the fact which the apostles asserted?—ED.

mony, and in opposition to it, is various, according as such circumstances do more or less constantly follow such a fact, as is asserted. Thus, were it asserted, that a certain man had taken arsenic, his death, together with such appearances of his body, as are usual in cases of this nature, would be a strong confirmation of the assertion; but his continuing to live, and to enjoy health, would be a contradiction of it. Or, were it asserted, that an apprentice had robbed his master, his appearing on a sudden possessed of considerably more money than usual, would render the assertion probable.

4. The competency of the witness to judge of the fact which he relates,\* is another point

\* The competency of the apostles to testify to the reality of the miracles wrought by Jesus, will not be questioned, when it is remembered that those miracles were wrought in the face of day; and were always such as their own senses enabled them to judge of. But we prefer, as heretofore, to confine ourselves, principally, to that one miracle on which Christianity may be said to rest; viz. the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Can there be any doubt as to the competency of the apostles to determine the identity of an individual with whom they had resided above three years? They were the witnesses chosen before of God to bear this testimony, just *because of their competency*; and this was the reason why the risen Saviour was shown 'not unto all the people,' because a mixed multitude could not so confidently affirm his identity. They could indeed have testified to having seen a living person, *said* to have been Jesus who was crucified; and this would have been all; but those on whose testimo-



to be considered. That competency depends partly on his abilities, and partly on the opportunities which he may be presumed to have had of seeing, or hearing what he states. Our determination of both these must be regulated by the nature of the subject, and the character and situation of the witness.

5. If the fact be stated to have happened, a considerable time ago,\* it should be examined, whether it is probable that the witness should recollect it clearly ; or whether he has used any means to assist his memory, as writing it down, or frequently mentioning it, or connecting it with other circumstances more

ny our faith rests, had not only a three years' residence with him *before* he suffered, but an intercourse with him for forty days *after he arose* ; and could affirm therefore, that ' he showed *himself* alive after his passion by many infallible proofs.' Their ' competency ' to testify is, therefore, unquestionable.—ED.

\* The apostles bore their testimony to the fact of the Saviour's resurrection openly before the whole Jewish nation, *only fifty days* after his crucifixion and *forty-seven* after the event took place. The testimony was borne, too, *where* the event occurred, and *while* it was fresh in the memory of every one that he had been put to death among them as a malefactor. Moreover, they could not have forgotten any of the circumstances, for, during forty of these days, they had held occasional intercourse with the risen Redeemer *personally* ; and besides, we can scarcely conceive of any other theme of discourse among them in their converse with each other. There was every thing therefore to render the recollection of every circumstance both vivid and exact.—ED.



easily remembered. This consideration is more especially deserving of attention, when the subject of the evidence is such, as is likely to escape the recollection ; as for instance, words spoken, especially a long discourse.

6. We should inquire, whether the witness be a man of general veracity.\* Though all men profess to regard truth, yet they respect it in very different degrees. Some men could scarcely be prevailed upon to violate it on any consideration ; while others are induced to sacrifice it to interest, to party, to a false delicacy, to vanity, or even to a compliment. Others again, though they would scruple to affirm what they knew to be wholly false, yet delight in telling extraordinary stories, and indulge themselves in exaggerating and embellishing the real facts which they relate. When they engage in relating an anecdote, and have forgotten any of its circumstances,

\* As to the 'general veracity' of the inspired writers, they were men of a nation who accounted all falsehood detestable, and as rendering him who practised it liable to endless perdition ; and especially if he practised it in the name of God, which, upon the supposition that they uttered falsehood, they must have done. The presumption, then, is in favor of their veracity in all the assertions, which they declare themselves authorized of God to make. But moreover, their veracity has never been questioned. Had they uttered falsehood it could easily have been shown by their enemies, but no imputation of falsehood, no suspicion of their veracity has descended to us.—ED.

unwilling to injure their narrative by omissions, they supply the defects of their memory by invention. Thus, though they, perhaps, entertain no direct deliberate design to deceive, yet the impression which they make on the minds of their hearers, is inconsistent with a correct view of the fact. It is evident, that the credit which can safely be given to any man's testimony, must be regulated by the regard which he may be presumed to have for truth; and the degree of that regard can be known only by an acquaintance with his general character.

7. It should also be considered, whether there be reason to presume that the witness spoke his real judgment\* of the fact in ques-

\* That when the apostles asserted that fundamental fact, the resurrection of Jesus, they expressed their 'real judgment' is evident, from their general veracity; (see preceding note) from the unvarying reiteration of their assertion to Jews and Gentiles, learned and unlearned, to kings and rulers and to the common people; and also, from their own distinct assertions, in connexions which render this point quite unquestionable. Thus, when in writing to the Corinthians, this was the subject of his discourse, Paul virtually asserts his deliberate belief of Christ's resurrection, by enumerating the consequences of the supposition that it were otherwise. 'If Christ be not risen, our preaching is vain, your faith is also vain, ye are yet in your sins; yea, and we are found *false witnesses of God*; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he raised not up' on the supposition that his apostles had a meaning different from that which their words express. See 1 Cor. 15:14—17. — Ed.

tion. For, there are subjects and occasions, on which even men of general veracity, assume the liberty of deviating from truth, and that liberty is, though tacitly, yet so generally allowed by the world, that scarcely any loss of character is sustained thereby. The world is a great theatre, men are players, each acting a part. On this stage they speak rather according to their assumed character, than according to their real judgment. And though this license is used more frequently, as to opinions, than as to the statement of facts, yet it is not strictly confined to opinions. And should we charge any man with a disregard to truth on this account, we should probably be despised for illiberality, or ignorance of the world. For the same man, when he had laid aside the mask, and retired within the circle of his private connexions, would shew that, under his real character, he felt the obligations of veracity ; and would give a very different view of the fact from what he had given on the stage. Whether men be at liberty, on any occasion, thus to suspend, by common consent, the operation of the laws of truth, is a question of morality, and not of moral evidence ; and therefore, falls not within the province of this tract. But, as the liberty is assumed, it is necessary to guard against the errors which would arise from ignorance of the practice. For, it is evident, that unless

we distinguish between the occasions, on which men regard themselves as bound to speak the truth, and those on which they do not, we must be continually exposed to error in believing their testimony. This distinction can be made only by attentive observation, or acquaintance with the world.

8. Whether the witness be a man of integrity,\* or of an unprincipled character, should also be considered. For, if the general tenor of a man's conduct shew, that he has no regard to the obligations of morality, it may be presumed, that he will not hesitate, on suitable occasions, to violate the truth.

9. It should be inquired, whether the interest† of the witness is likely to be affected

\* Of *all* the writers of the sacred volume, without exception, and of all the authorized witnesses of the Saviour's resurrection, we are warranted in saying, 'They were *holy* men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' The strain of their writings is sufficient pledge of their 'integrity.'—ED.

† The temporal interest of the apostles of Christ could not be subserved by the testimony they bore respecting him. On the contrary, the testimony declared virtually the futility of the hopes of temporal interest which they had previously entertained. They *had* hoped for offices of trust, and profit, and honor, in a temporal kingdom of Messiah, but correct views of the nature of his kingdom dissipated these illusions, and convinced them that their hopes were as empty as the wind. Yet with a knowledge that the testimony was unpopular and unprofitable, they continued to bear it. What but truth could have sustained them?—ED.

by the decision of the point in question. For, experience shows, that, under the bias of interest, men scarcely ever judge correctly, or give a fair and impartial evidence. They are then induced to suppress some circumstances, to soften others, and to give to the whole matter such a turn, as is most favourable to themselves. This, therefore, is the principal circumstance which renders testimony suspicious. Hence, it is a wise rule in our law, to reject the evidence of all those who are interested in the decision of a cause.

10. As the testimony of an interested person, in his own favour, is suspicious, that testimony, which makes against his interest,\* is

\* Not only did the testimony of the apostles to the resurrection of Christ *not promote* their interest, but it was manifestly *inimical* to it. It made them to be accounted 'the filth of the earth, and offscouring of all things;' it was for this that 'in every city bonds and afflictions awaited them;' it was for this that they 'hungered, and thirsted, and were naked, and buffeted, and had no certain dwelling place' and 'stood in jeopardy every hour,'—it was for this that the friendship of the High Priest, and the suffrages of the whole nation towards Paul were changed into the most outrageous and unrelenting persecution, so that he was constrained to appeal to a heathen emperor from the injustice of God's High Priest! So true is the language of the poet, 'starving their gains, and martyrdom their price.' Safely may we challenge universal history to produce a single instance of men willingly enduring such a complication of evils in the endeavour to establish a known falsehood. We repeat, that nothing but truth could have sustained them.--ED.



worthy of great credit ; for, there then appears no other reason for his giving such evidence, than the force of truth. Here, however, it should be carefully ascertained, that his evidence is really opposite to his interests ; and, in some cases, this is attended with difficulty. For that, which is opposite to a man's general interest, may tend to promote some particular purpose, which he has at that time in view. Nor, should the rule be extended without caution to what opposes the interests of the witness's party. For, in parties, secret enmities and separate interests arise, which make an individual sometimes willing, for private purposes, to cast a reproach upon his partizans. Hence, what is regarded as the concession of an opponent, and therefore indubitable, may, sometimes, be fabricated, for the purpose of promoting that interest of the witness, which, at that particular time, influences his mind. Most frequently, however, the influence of party prejudice operates in the same way with that of private interest. And, hence arises the difficulty of obtaining a fair representation of facts, in times of great political animosity.

11. The manner in which the evidence is given, may afford some assistance in judging of the veracity of the witness. There is a simplicity and firmness\* equally remote from

\* The effect of this 'simplicity and firmness' in the



hesitation, and an assumed confidence, with which men generally speak the truth. This, though difficult to be described, may be learnt by observation.

12. The occasion on which a testimony is given, may, sometimes, render it suspicious. Thus, should a man inform me, unasked, and without any assignable reason, that a person just dead, and from whom I had no expectation, had *not* left me any thing in his will, I should be apt to suspect his assertion. But, if there were any apparent reason why he should give me this information, provided it were true, no such suspicion would be excited by it.

13. It should be considered, whether the evidence for the fact rests on the testimony of only one witness, or of more. For, as has been already observed, the concurrence of

first preachers of Christianity was felt by their hearers on the day of Pentecost. And the same characteristics distinguished their testimony, wherever it was borne. 'The *boldness* of Peter and John' attracted the attention of the council, and the same characteristic, in Stephen's invective, enraged them to madness. 'Paul and Barnabas waxed *bold*,' at Antioch; Paul preached *boldly* at Damascus, and again at Jerusalem, and again for three months at Ephesus; and in one word, '*all the apostles spake the word of God with boldness.*' See Acts 4: 13, 31; 9: 27, 29; 13: 46; 19: 8, *cum multis aliis*. Could *impostors* without rank, wealth, influence, or learning, and surrounded by learned, powerful, influential, and dignified enemies, have done thus to give currency to *a lie*? It is impossible.—ED.

independent witnesses, increases the weight of their evidence, and that in a much greater degree than in the proportion of their numbers.\* Here, also, the nature of the subject should be attended to. For, if it be such, as would probably be mentioned by several persons, on a supposition that it were true, then its being asserted by only one, detracts from its credibility. But, on the other hand, if the fact be of so very private a nature, that if it had happened, it would, probably, have been known only by one person ; then, though the evidence of a single witness be of less weight than that of more, his testimony is not rendered suspicious by his being alone. For, as strong evidence as the nature of the case admits, is here produced. The degree of our assent, however, should be carefully proportioned to the weight of the evidence. In judging whether the nature of the case admit of the testimony of only one witness, we should consider, whether the representation of it bears the marks of simplicity, or those of art and contrivance, so to construct it, as to exclude the evidence of all others, and to make it rest on the testimony of the witness alone. For such marks of art and contrivance, would evidently render it suspicious.

14. Is the subject of such a nature, and so circumstanced as to admit of an easy confuta-

\* See Note on page 81.

tion,\* if it be false? This consideration, also, is of great importance; for, otherwise, the law of reputation, the great principle of human conduct, opposes no barrier against falsehood; but the witness is at liberty to make what misrepresentations he pleases, and thereby to gratify any secret passion, or to promote any

\* How easily might the alleged miracles of Moses and Christ and the apostles have been disproved had they been false! They were wrought in the presence of enemies, who wanted neither sagacity nor inclination to disprove them; yet this is their testimony, 'This is the finger of God.' Exodus 8:19. 'This man doeth many miracles.' John 11:47. 'A notable miracle hath been wrought by them,' Acts 4:16. How easily, too, might the resurrection of Jesus have been disproved, had it not occurred. Nothing was necessary but to produce the body; and that, if the seal, and stone, and watch, could make it sure, they must have had in their possession. But if it were stolen, why was no examination of the soldiers had! Surely this would have been easy! Why no attempt to convict the apostles of the theft? There could be no difficulty in this! Herod acted differently by the four quaternions of soldiers who kept Peter; for though there was no reason to believe that they had facilitated his escape, they were put to death; and thus Herod acquitted himself, before the Jews, of any collusion with the keepers. But any attempt like this, on the part of the rulers towards those who kept Christ's sepulchre, would only have increased the number of witnesses of the resurrection, five-fold; for the soldiers, sixty in number, were eye witnesses of that event, and would have testified to it, had their life been endangered through the imputation of having slept on guard. Thus the ease with which it could have been disproved, if untrue, renders the probability that it did occur, immensely the stronger, because it has never been disproved.—ED.

private interest, without danger of disgrace. For the same reason it should be considered, whether the situation of the witness be such, as to secure him from shame, if his falsehood be detected, for this would weaken the credibility of his testimony.

15. A vague account of a fact, is not as worthy of credit, as a relation which contains all the particulars\* of time, place, persons, and the like. Because, as all these particulars afford means of detection, if the relation be false, it may be presumed that the relater is satisfied that his account will bear examination. For the same reason, quotations are entitled to credit, in proportion as the means of examining them are afforded by a state-

\* How widely remote from 'vagueness' are the scriptural accounts of the miracles of Moses, Christ and the apostles. They are remarkably particular and specific; being deficient in none of those characteristics of a true narrative, which a sagacious writer (Bp. Wilson) has embodied in the following hexameter;

'Quis? Quid? Ubi? Quibus auxiliis? Cur? Quomodo? Quando?'

These questions, as he observes, may be considered as constituting a test by which to try any system. No narrator of falsehood will encompass his relation with so many means of detection as the particulars which should reply to these questions will present: i. e. He will never tell us *who* is the agent, and *what* his act, and *where* the scene, and *with what* assistances, or means, it was performed, and for *what purpose*, and *in what manner*, and *when*. But the inspired writers scarcely ever relate a miracle, without being so circumstantial as to inform us on all these points.--ED.

ment, not only of the book, but of the volume, and the page, whence they are taken, and, even of the library where the book, if scarce, may be found.

16. If, while the witness speaks positively as to some particulars, he acknowledges himself to be ignorant of others, or to be only imperfectly acquainted with them; this acknowledgment tends to confirm his evidence,\* as to those which he positively affirms. Because, it carries with it the appearance of caution, not to exceed his knowledge, and shows that he is not prepared to affirm any thing that may be asked him, to make out the story.

17. Of the statement of ancient facts, it should be inquired, what reception they met with when they were first made. If they were

\* This tacit acknowledgment appears sometimes to be made by the inspired writers relative to the facts which they record: and it in no way invalidates their claims to inspiration. The evangelists were inspired to record, without error, *what they knew* of the facts connected with the life, and death, and resurrection of Jesus. Now some had *personal* knowledge of some things, and others of other things; hence, as each makes his own record, and omits some things which others relate, he tacitly declares that *his knowledge* did not extend to those points. Thus Matthew, Mark, and Luke, omit many things which John supplies; and, as to the resurrection of Christ and his several appearances, the variety in the evangelical record is to be attributed to the caution our author here mentions; and instead of being considered defects, should *recommend* the Gospels to us, as faithful narratives.—ED.



generally believed, by those who might have confuted them, had they been false, and if they were disputed by none, they may generally be considered, as well established. If they were disputed at first, but, on examination, were admitted, they are confirmed by their trial. But, if they continued to be discredited,\* they are to be suspected ; and,

\* It must be acknowledged that the Christian religion, which was first promulgated to the nation of Israel, has by that nation generally been 'discredited' even to this day. Yet the manifest causes of their rejection of it, are such as not to warrant us in refusing it our belief. That nation have always looked for outward splendor, and worldly triumph, in the kingdom of their Messiah ; and hence its *real* character offends their 'prejudices.' The great majority of them, also, never gave the claims of the Christian religion on their belief, a serious and calm examination. The very name of 'Jesus of Nazareth' inflames their 'passions,' and incapacitates them for calm investigation, and thus perpetuates that 'ignorance' on the subject, which, like a veil, is spread over the minds of the whole people. The Christian religion was, at first, disbelieved among them through the influence of 'interest ;' strong as was the light of evidence in its favor, if they should receive it (i. e. if the rulers at Jerusalem should do so) they must, in the same breath, admit that they had imbrued their hands in the blood of their Messiah. The thousands who believed on the day of Pentecost, were among the common people, with few, if any exceptions ; of course they were less implicated in the death of Jesus than the rulers were, and 'interest' presented a much weaker barrier in the way of their believing. It was thus, also, at places remote from Jerusalem, where, to believe in Jesus, was not, by necessary implication, to plead guilty to his murder. At such places, the appeal to their own scriptures was usually



unless the unbelievers may fairly be presumed to have been influenced by ignorance, interest, prejudice, or passion, they should be rejected. A comparison, therefore, should be made between the believers and unbelievers, in respect to ability and impartiality, and its result should determine our judgment. These are the general principles upon which our assent to ancient facts, may be regulated. But, to estimate more correctly the influence which the reception of any account by those to whom it was originally presented, ought to have on our belief, we should further inquire, whether that reception proceeded on due examination, and on just principles, or may be fairly attributed to ignorance, credulity, negligence, or prejudice. Thus, where the parties, who originally received the account, gave them only a careless, or, as it has been termed, a

followed by the conviction of the hearers that he was the Messiah. On the whole, therefore, though the religion of Christ was *not* received by those to whom it was first preached, their rejection of it should not weaken our faith in it, inasmuch as their unbelief can all be clearly traced to either ignorance, prejudice, passion, or interest; or to the united operation of some, or all of them. But if we except the Jews, and inquire the reception which the gospel of Christ met with in *other* nations, when it was first preached among them, the Acts of the apostles furnish a triumphant answer. See especially the narratives of its reception by the Samaritans, the proselyted Gentiles, and finally, the idolatrous Gentiles. Acts 8: 6--8. 11: 21. 13: 46--48.

—ED.

mere *otiose*\* assent, that assent ought not to influence our judgment, as it should, where it may be presumed, that they felt the importance of ascertaining its credibility ; and therefore, examined it with due care, before they admitted it. Hence, the admission of stories of prodigies, unconnected with the faith or practice of those who received them, is entitled to little weight ; while the reception of accounts of miracles, wrought for the establishment of Christianity, ought to produce a conviction of their truth. Because, it is highly probable, that the belief of the former was not regulated by due examination : whereas, the greatest interests being immediately connected with the latter, it is altogether improbable that they should have been admitted, without the strictest scrutiny. For, it cannot be reasonably imagined, that vast multitudes should be induced to sacrifice their prejudices, and their immediate interests, in relinquishing the religion, in which they had been educated ; the religion of a long line of ancestors ; a religion which was the object of veneration, the glory of their country, and hitherto of themselves ; to embrace a new religion, the object of universal contempt and abhorrence ; when, by so doing, they gave up all prospects of worldly prosperity and ease, exposed themselves to general scorn and

\* Paley's Evidence of Christianity, vol. ii. p. 17.

malice, and frequently to severe persecution, without having carefully examined the credibility of the miracles, on which its claims to their reception, were founded.

Thus, also, the reception of accounts of miracles, wrought in confirmation\* of opinions already established, is not entitled to the same influence on our judgment, as it is when the miracles were performed, to establish new opinions, opposite to such as have been previously entertained; and, especially, when those miracles were wrought in the presence of enemies. For, in the latter case, no reason can be assigned for their reception, but a full conviction of their truth. But, in the former, there being nothing to excite those who received the accounts to scrutinize them, it is probable they were received without due examination; besides, it is difficult to ascertain, whether or not they were really believed by those who contributed to propagate them, and were not merely *pious frauds*. Thus, stories of Popish miracles, may easily be circulated in Popish countries, and may be received without examination by the ignorant multitude; while they would meet with no credit among Protestants. So, again, the reception of many historical facts, honourable to the nation among whom they were published, or dishonourable to their enemies; or, credita-

\* Paley's Evidence of Christianity, vol. ii. p. 21.

ble to that party in a state, which possessed, almost exclusively, the opportunity of transmitting the records of events to posterity, or discreditable to their opponents, ought not to induce us, implicitly, to decide upon their truth ; but, in forming our judgments of them, we should make due allowance for the effects of prejudice. Thus, for example, it may be reasonably presumed, that in relating the transactions between the Romans and Carthaginians, the Roman historian would be influenced by attachment to his own country, and hatred of its enemies ; and, that the same prejudice would induce his countrymen in general, to admit his accounts, though partial, since they were in their own favour. Of course, that admission is not of sufficient authority to warrant our implicit credit. Had the works of any Carthaginian historian reached us, we might have seen some of the same facts stated less to the honour of Rome, and more to that of Carthage ; and yet, have found reason to presume, that his accounts also were fully admitted by the Carthaginians. On the other hand, when the facts related are dishonourable to the nation or party who yet received the accounts of them, that reception confirms their truth. Thus, as the History of the Bible, though it records the peculiar privileges conferred on the Jews by the Almighty, yet, as it relates also the base and ungrateful returns

which they continually made for them, their universal reception of it renders its truth indubitable.

It should also be considered, whether the accounts of these ancient facts,\* were published near the time and place; when and where† they are stated to have happened.

\* Paley's Evidence of Christianity, vol. ii. pp. 6 & 9.

† The sacred Scriptures possess, in a remarkable degree, this evidence of authenticity. Moses, and Joshua, and Samuel, and others of the Old Testament writers, committed their histories to writing among the people, and at, or immediately after, the occurrence of the transactions related. (See note on page 166.) So also the evangelists wrote their histories in the very age when the events they record occurred; and two of them certainly, and all of them probably, were eye and ear witnesses of what they relate. Even the epistles contain internal evidence of being the works of the same age; as for example, that to the Hebrews speaks of the mission and ministry of Jesus as having occurred in '*these last days.*' Heb. 1 : 2. No time then had elapsed which could possibly give birth to doubt of the real occurrence of the events. Moreover, there is external evidence for the early existence of these books;—for their existence even in the apostolic age. This evidence is derived from the writings of the apostolical fathers, who lived in the times of the apostles, and who often quote the scriptures which we possess, as books generally read and received by Christians. Now this could not have been done, while the apostles were yet living, unless they wrote the books which passed under their names; for they would have disclaimed them, and set the churches on their guard against them. But such not having been the case, it is morally certain that the apostles wrote the epistles which we receive; and thus, the antiquity of these books being proved as great as the apostolic times, both their genuineness and authenticity are proved also.—ED.



For, if they were not published *till long after*, they are suspicious ; because it does not appear that they were ever heard of before ; because it generally seems improbable, if not impracticable, for the person who asserts them to have obtained any just grounds for his assertion ; and, because they want that confirmation which should be derived from their reception, by persons who might have confuted them, had they been false. Thus, the miracles ascribed to Mahomet, by those who wrote several centuries after his death, which miracles were never heard of before, are unworthy of credit. But, those secret facts of history, which have been published from papers in the cabinets of princes, or in the possession of private families are credible,\*

\* If there be any exception to the moral certainty of the genuineness of the apostolical epistles, it exists in the case of the second and third epistles of John. And these have those claims to our belief which our author here mentions. They were letters to private persons, and not to those in official stations. Hence it is natural that they should be kept in the possession of their families long after the decease both of the writer, and of those to whom they were addressed ; and their existence only known to those families ; and, perhaps, not even to them. When first discovered, then, all the immediate vouchers for their genuineness were gone ; and the church of Christ, (ever scrupulously careful not to admit into the Canon any but undoubtedly genuine writings of the apostles,) naturally hesitated to receive these, till they should be thoroughly tested. But these epistles are not without very ancient testimony to their genuineness. Ireneus, (A. D. 170) Clement of Alex-



though they did not become publicly known, till a considerable time after the event. For, as from their nature, they were incapable of being publicly known, except from these secret papers; and, it is highly improbable, that access should be had to them, till a considerable time had elapsed, they have the best evidence, of which the nature of the case admits. Besides, their credibility depends, not merely on the historian, but on the authenticity of the papers themselves, the opportunities which the original writers of them possessed of being acquainted with the facts which they relate, and the degree of probability of their being disposed to relate them fairly.

If the accounts were published at a distance from the *place* where the facts were stated to have happened, especially if that be a place seldom visited by foreigners, they are suspicious; because the restraints of the law of reputation can then be felt but little by their

andria, (A. D. 180) Origen, (A. D. 220) Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius, Jerome, Rufinus, and others, quote and receive them; though, even then, some few persons were still in doubt as to their genuineness. A still further examination however, has removed all doubts; and, for many centuries, they have occupied their present place in the sacred Canon. This scrupulous care and rigid examination should even confirm our confidence in these epistles, for, as our author observes in the commencement of this Special Direction, (17.) 'If they were disputed at first, but, on examination, were admitted, they are confirmed by their trial.'—ED.

relater ; and, their public reception cannot have been regulated by due examination, but must have arisen from the confidence reposed in the assertor ; which confidence may often be accounted for from the influence of prejudice, interest, or party. Thus, the miracles formerly published in Europe, as having been performed by Popish missionaries in India, are unworthy of credit.

18. The entire omission of a thing, pretended to have been public, by all other authors, who might naturally have been expected to mention it, renders it suspicious. And it is the more suspicious, in proportion as those other authors may be presumed to have been engaged by interest, by principle, or by the nature of their work to record it, if they had been acquainted with it. But, if a satisfactory reason can be assigned why these authors should omit the mention of the fact, it then ceases to be suspicious on that account.

19. Hitherto we have supposed, that we have testimony on only one side of a question ; but, it often happens, that witnesses are produced on both sides. In this case, we should examine whether their evidences cannot be so interpreted, as to agree with each other. If they can, such interpretation should be adopted ; because, it is to be presumed, until the contrary appear, that the witnesses on both sides speak truth. But, if

their evidence cannot be reconciled, it is then to be observed, that one affirmative witness may countervail many negatives ; provided the fact which he affirms be of such a nature, that it might probably have taken place, and yet not have been noticed by those who deny it. If this cannot with probability be supposed, and the witnesses oppose each other in contradictory propositions, so that those on one side must be true, and those on the other false, we must then judge according to the *number* of the witnesses on each side, their *credit*, and the *comparative probability* of their respective testimonies. If the two latter circumstances be equal, the superior number is entitled to the greater credit. If the first and last be equal, the side on which the witnesses are of the greater credit, is entitled to the preference. To judge of their credit we must apply the principles which have been already laid down. But, if the two former circumstances be equal, the testimony more probable in itself is to be believed.

20. In some cases, the witnesses may agree as to certain circumstances, and disagree as to others. Here, the nature of these circumstances should be considered. If they be such as were not likely to excite the attention of the witnesses, and fix themselves in their memory, their disagreement does not weaken their evidence as to the principal

facts, in which they agree ; but, on the contrary, rather confirms it. For, experience shows, that men very rarely agree in all the immaterial circumstances in relating the same fact. And, hence, a perfect coincidence, in every point, carries with it the appearance of a preconcerted plan of deception. But, if the circumstances were such, that they may be presumed to have made a strong impression on their minds, and to be recollected, then their disagreement renders their evidence suspicious. In making this distinction, we must be governed by experience ; for, it is that which teaches us what circumstances do usually excite the attention, and fix themselves in the memory, and what do not. The suspicion thus excited, may rise so high, as to justify the rejection of the evidence of both witnesses, especially if, on other accounts, their testimony appear suspicious. But, it would scarcely be safe, on all such occasions, to disbelieve both. For, one of them may be a man of strict veracity, and state the fact correctly ; while the other is a trifler with truth, and gives, in part, a false testimony. Besides, were such a rule established, it would render it easy for dishonest men to discredit any evidence which they might wish to be disbelieved. It would, therefore, be proper to consider whether one of these witnesses be, in all other respects, unobjection-

able ; and, in that case, to believe him, and reject the other.

In subjects of *Remote Testimony*, the same observations are applicable to every witness through whom the testimony passes, till it reaches us.

On the credit due to the evidence of General Notoriety.

The great consideration here, is, how far the subject is likely to be known, and what probability there is, that the assertions respecting it, should be contradicted, if they were false.

Mathematical subjects admit of being certainly known, and mistakes in them may be easily detected. In them, therefore, those conclusions which are universally believed, may be relied upon with safety. Events, also, in general, admit of being known ; and when they are subject to the observation of many persons, mis-statements in them easily admit of correction ; but when they can have been observed by only a few, their mis-statements are not easily corrected ; and, hence the general opinion of them, though uncontradicted, cannot be as safely trusted. On philosophical subjects, many opinions have prevailed universally, which, by subsequent discoveries, have appeared to be false. And, probably, opinions are still held on some of



them, which will be proved to be erroneous by future discoveries. Here, therefore, general notoriety, or as it may be termed, general opinion, merits less credit. But, something may be done to regulate the degree of assent, by considering whether the science of the subject in question, be still in its infancy, or have made great progress towards perfection. These remarks will serve to show how the principle on which the evidence of general notoriety is founded, is to be applied.

In Proverbs, and General maxims of Conduct, it should be examined, whether there be no ambiguity in the language in which they are expressed ; which may have contributed to their general belief, in a sense in which they are not true. It should also be considered, whether they depend for their prevalence on their intrinsic merit alone, or upon the credit and influence of some particular classes of men, who are interested in their support ; for then, they are less worthy of belief.

As to the application of proverbs to particular cases, the highest evidence which they afford, is that the event will happen most frequently, but not always as they assert. But then, this evidence they do afford ; and, he who rejects them, though he may succeed occasionally, will, at length, find that he has deceived himself.



### On the credit due to Reports.

Many of the particulars, which should regulate our assent here, are the same with those contained under the head of Testimony. It will, therefore, be sufficient to mention them, without enlarging upon them. They are as follows : The probability or improbability of the fact, under the known circumstances of the case ; the consistency of the account in itself, and with subsequent circumstances ; the probability of the facts being known ; whether the account were likely to be contradicted, if false ; and whether any particular interests may be promoted by it. Added to this, it should be considered, from what quarter the report originated, and whether it be propagated by men of judgment in such affairs, or only by ignorant and credulous people. If some time have elapsed since the origin of the report, our judgment of its credibility may be assisted by considering the reception with which it has continued to meet. If, though it prevailed strongly at first, it afterwards died away, and have not revived since, it is suspicious. But its continuance in credit, or its reviving again after having been dropped, are circumstances in its favour.

Though reports are seldom without some foundation, yet they are frequently inaccurate. They are subject to exaggeration and misrepresentation. Hence, though they are en-

titled to some degree of credit, they can seldom be relied on with safety. On subjects, therefore, which are important to us, they ought not to be neglected, but to excite us to ascertain, by further inquiry, what degree of truth there may be in them.

On belief in Tradition.

Our assent to this kind of evidence, should be regulated by nearly the same circumstances, which are mentioned under the foregoing head.

On the credit due to Analogy.

With regard to this extensive species of probable evidence, very few directions seem capable of being given. It may, however, be observed, that, as to those qualities which have no necessary connexion with each other, it is by experience alone, that it can be known, which of them do, or do not, either constantly or generally, co-exist in the same subject. Hence, experience seems the only safe ground of reasoning by analogy. It may, also, be remarked, that the greater the number of points of resemblance are between the subject in question, and that from which the analogy is taken, and the stronger the resemblance is in each of these points, the safer will our conclusions be ; and, where the resemblance holds in only one or two points, or is in itself weak, the conclusion is very uncertain.

On the credit due to inferences from Facts or Premises.

As inferences from facts are deduced by analogy, what has been said above, is applicable to them.

On presumptive evidence, Blackstone (vol. iv. page 352) says, that 'presumptive evidence of felony should be admitted cautiously; for, the law holds, that it is better that ten guilty persons should escape, than that one innocent should suffer.' This rule of law manifestly supposes, that presumptive evidence is attended with great uncertainty; and, consequently, it ought, in other cases also, and not only in those of felony, to be admitted with caution. For, though the consequences of an error in deciding on a case of felony be more awful than on a question of property, and much more awful than those which would attend an erroneous opinion, in private matters; yet, as far as respects the mere error itself, independent of its consequences, all the cases are equal. And, as the attainment of truth ought to be our object in all our inquiries, we ought at all times to be cautious in deciding on this species of evidence. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to found our decisions upon it, because no other evidence can be procured to determine the question. It is, therefore, requisite to

consider how we may proceed in such cases with the greatest safety.

Sir Matthew Hale, we are told by Blackstone, lays down two rules to be observed, in trials for felony. 'First, never to convict a man for stealing the goods of a person unknown, merely because he will give no account how he came by them, unless an actual felony be proved of such goods. And, secondly, never to convict any person of murder or manslaughter, till at least the body be found dead, on account of two instances he mentions, where persons were executed for the murder of others, who were then alive, but missing.'

To these rules relating to felonies, the following, of a more general nature, may be added. As the same circumstances may attend different facts, and it is our business to determine from the circumstances established in proof, which of those various facts did exist, we ought in the first place, to inquire what facts the circumstances proved, might attend; secondly, to state each of those facts distinctly; and lastly, to compare each with every circumstance, in order to discover with which of the facts all those circumstances do most probably agree. The formality of this procedure is necessary, because we are always, through prejudice, or by the suggestion of others, in danger of connecting the circum-

stances with some particular fact; and, thus another fact, with which they might, perhaps, be connected with greater probability, will be overlooked. But, if we proceed with this formality, we shall be less likely to overlook the real fact; and, if we thus cautiously compare each fact with the known circumstances, we may find, that, though with some they may agree equally, yet, with one or more of the other circumstances, there is only one of the supposed facts, which can well agree; and, thus we may discover which the true fact is.

On deducing inferences from premises, it is scarcely consistent with the object of this tract to enlarge, but the reader is referred to books on logic, for the rules which are necessary to be observed. And for the modes of proceeding in the doctrine of chances, and purchase of annuities, he is referred to such of the writers on mathematics, as have treated these subjects professedly; they being entirely mathematical subjects.

## CHAPTER V.

ON THE KINDS OF EVIDENCE OF WHICH DIFFERENT  
SUBJECTS ADMIT, AND ON WHICH THEY ARE AC-  
TUALLY BELIEVED.

MANY Truths are believed by most men, on a lower species of evidence, than that by which they might be proved. Hence it will be proper to inquire, not only of what evidence different subjects admit, but also, on what they are usually believed. The subjects of human knowledge are so numerous, that it would be impracticable to mention them all; and, were it practicable it would be useless; as the mention of a few will be sufficient.

Mathematical truths, though capable of demonstration, are admitted by most men, only on general notoriety. For, they are neither able to understand the demonstrations of them themselves, nor have they, ordinarily, for their truth, the evidence of those who do understand them; but, finding them generally believed in the world, they also believe them. Their belief, also, is confirmed by experience; for, when they have occasion to apply them, they find that they lead to just conclusions.



Moral maxims and proverbs, are usually admitted on the same evidence. For, though they be deduced from the observation of life, yet few men possess sufficient attention or discernment, to form them for themselves. Most men admit them because they are generally believed. And though they be capable of confirmation from experience, yet, as they are not universally true, but true only for the most part, their confirmation must be drawn from the comparison of a great variety of cases, to which they apply. This comparison few will take the trouble to make, and, therefore, they seem to be believed by most men, only on their general notoriety.

Of the properties and effects of the subjects of natural history, as animals, vegetables, minerals, fossils, earths, &c. These were originally known by personal observation; and, as the subjects still exist, they are still capable of being known in the same way by all; and are so known by some. And when the subjects lie within our reach, and require little pains or skill in examination, it is on personal observation that their properties and effects are believed in general. But as many of them lie at a great distance, and are obtained with difficulty; and, as their examination requires extraordinary skill and discrimination, so their properties and effects can be

personally observed only by few. If, therefore, they be believed by the bulk of mankind at all, they must be believed on the credit of others. The highest degree of evidence which can ordinarily be obtained for them, must be drawn from books published by naturalists, who have made personal observations on them. And the information possessed by those who have not read these books, is derived from a still lower source, as from compilations or general notoriety.

Of the effects of certain substances on mankind, we have, in many cases, the evidence of personal experience, confirmed by the experience of others. In some cases, our information must be derived entirely from others. Often, our experience of these effects has not been uniform; and others testify the same. For instance, the things which agree with us at one time, disagree with us at another. Here, we suppose, either that the substances are dissimilar, or that our bodies are in a different state.

Certain sciences relate to some of these subjects, and certain trades or professions to others. The learned in those sciences, and the members of those professions, obtain a considerable part of the information which they possess, relative to those subjects which belong to their own line, by personal obser-

vation ; but, for a large share even of such information, they must be indebted to the observation of others. Thus, a physician, for instance, cannot have obtained his whole stock of knowledge by his own observation, but must have derived much of it from books or conversation.

What has been said, relates only to the general truths belonging to the subjects above mentioned. The application of those truths to particular cases, must proceed on the principles of analogy. For, it is only by the resemblance, which different subjects bear to each other in some particulars, which have been already ascertained, that we can infer, that they also resemble each other in all other particulars, and will be productive of the same effects. Thus, for example, I may have learned, that the metal which is called gold, is yellow, heavy, fixed, malleable, ductile, fusible, and soluble, in aqua regia, but not in aquafortis. But, if I would decide, whether a piece of metal, which I perceived to be yellow, heavy, fixed, fusible, and soluble, in aqua regia, but not in aquafortis, were also malleable and ductile (unless I determined it by experiments) it would be only by analogy that I could presume that it was so, and therefore really gold. In these cases our reasonings rise no higher than probability, though it is admitted, that that probability

amounts nearly to moral certainty. For, it is not necessary that substances, which resemble each other in some properties, should also resemble each other in others. It is possible, for instance, that a substance may exist, which possesses all the other properties of gold, except its malleability and ductility, or which possesses even all the known properties of gold, without exception, and, together with them, certain other properties which would really change its nature, and constitute it a different thing. But, as neither accident nor research has ever presented us with such a substance, it is highly improbable that it should exist.

Of facts, which respect the constitution of nature, and the changes of the heavenly bodies, the more obvious are known by personal observation, confirmed by the uniform experience of all, whom we have ever heard speak of them. Some persons also know, that they depend on causes of so permanent a nature, that the constitution of the world must be altered or suspended, before they will cease. On these subjects, therefore, they have the highest degree of moral evidence. For, the ebbing and flowing of the tides, they who have lived always in an inland country have only the observation of others. But then, all whom they hear speak on the subject affirm

it, and therefore, they firmly believe it. They who have lived near the sea-shore, have the evidence of their own experience, added to the observation of others. And again, other persons know, that it depends on causes as permanent as the changes of night and day, and have the same species and degree of evidence with that above mentioned.

Present facts, such as the existence of certain cities or buildings, of certain institutions, of countries, seas, or mountains, &c. admit of personal observation, testimony, or general notoriety. But the personal observation of these, as they are specific facts, belongs to a higher species of evidence. When the things lie at a convenient distance, they are actually known by many on this evidence. But, when they lie at a great distance, they are known by most men, on no higher evidence than testimony; or, more frequently by general notoriety. Few men, for instance, have ever been in China, fewer still at Peking. The greater part of mankind have, probably, never been informed, by eye-witnesses, of their existence, and therefore, must believe it on general notoriety.

Of the hand-writing of persons, we judge by analogy. For, from the resemblance which the writing in question bears to the



writing of a certain person which we have seen before, we infer that it was written by him. The resemblance, on which we judge, is not so much in the shape of each particular letter, as in a certain general character of the writing, which can hardly be described. Our ability to decide here with safety is confirmed, or weakened, according to the experience which we have had of the correctness or incorrectness of our decisions in former cases. Nearly the same remark may be made of determining, that certain pictures are the work of a certain master ; or, that a certain building was planned by a certain architect. Here the decision is founded on the resemblance which the works in question bear to the works of the same kind, which we have seen before ; and, here too, the resemblance consists in the general style, rather than in the particular parts.

Of the effects of institutions on the character, manners, and happiness of mankind, or of peace and war ; riches and poverty, &c. By comparing the state of one people, where these prevail, with that of another, where they do not ; or, where their opposites prevail, a tolerable judgment may be formed of their effects. If we would collect general truths on these subjects, we can do it only by a careful study of history, and even by a com-



parison of different histories. The evidence attainable here, is of the nature of personal observation, exercised upon that species of testimony which is called historic evidence. Certain general opinions on these points are also current in the world, and which are believed by individuals on the authority of that general currency. These are, perhaps, more numerous than those which are formed by personal investigation. Some of them may be true, but many are probably false.

Of the knowledge of men's motives and intentions. The proper evidence of these is testimony. But, where a man does not reveal them to us by his words, we can collect them only by inference from his conduct. And, here an important question occurs: Whether the intentions and motives of men can be safely inferred from their actions? This is affirmed by some, but denied by others. It is obvious, however, that in the administration of justice in this country, it is taken for granted, that they may be safely inferred; for, in most criminal cases, the intention constitutes the very hinge of the question of guilt or innocence; and, that intention must be decided upon by the jury from the conduct. But, if it cannot be inferred, how can they safely give a verdict? And, it should be observed, that stronger evidence is

requisite for a legal decision, especially in criminal cases, than for an opinion in private life. This is, indeed, only an ‘*Argumentum ad verecundiam* ;’ but, when all the circumstances of the case are duly considered, it will appear to be as strong an one of the kind, as can be adduced. It may, however, be confirmed by observation or experience, the great principle of moral evidence. For, observation and experience will point out to us certain circumstances in a man’s conduct, which will indicate his motives and intentions, however he may attempt to disguise them by words. And, doubtless, the most strenuous opposer of this doctrine, if placed in certain situations, where his passions were greatly agitated, would find that he himself could interpret a man’s intentions by his conduct. If, for instance, he were passing through a wood alone, in the dusk of the evening, with a large sum of money about him, which he had just received in the presence of several people, and should observe one of those people watching his approach, half concealed behind one of the trees, with a pistol in his hand, his fears would soon teach him, that the man intended to rob him. Or, if a person, whom he had greatly offended, should, with strong marks of rage in his countenance, seize up a weapon, or draw his sword, or pull out a pistol, he would have little doubt that

he meant to kill him. In some few cases, passions are more faithful advisers than reason ; for, they sometime set aside the sophistries with which interest or prejudice had deluded us. There can be as little doubt that a man, who, with weapons concealed about him, waits for his enemy, or industriously seeks him out, and kills him, was actuated by malice prepense. It will be said, perhaps, that these are strong cases. But, if these be admitted, it must then be acknowledged, that there are cases in which the motives and intentions may be inferred by the actions : and the only questions then will be, under what circumstances, and how far the indications of the conduct can be trusted. If observation and experience be fairly consulted, it will be found, that their information is not confined to such cases as those above-mentioned. By comparing the conduct of men, known to be actuated by certain motives or intentions, with that of others not so actuated ; or, by reflecting on our own conduct, when we were under similar influences, we shall discover marks which may be safely trusted ; and to which we can scarcely help attending when we are not interested to the contrary. In the application of these marks, we reason by analogy. If it be said, that no indications, learnt from experience, can afford us a certain knowledge of motives and intentions, it

may be replied, that human affairs do not admit of certainty, but of probability only ; and that the probability here is often as great as the events of life usually afford. When experience teaches us, that the same marks in the conduct may arise from two different motives, there we cannot safely infer from those marks, which of them exists ; but, must determine this from other circumstances. Thus, in the application of the old maxim, ' He confesses the fault who avoids the trial,' there is often great danger of error ; for a man may avoid the trial from another motive, besides consciousness of guilt ; as, because he is convinced that such is the temper of the times, or such the character of his judges, that he cannot obtain impartial justice. For, there have been times in which to be brought to trial, whether guilty or not, was almost a certain prelude to being convicted. It was so in the famous circuit of Judge Jefferies, and during the reign of Robespierre.

The knowledge of human nature, *i. e.* a knowledge of the dispositions and characters of men, of their capacities, of the confidence which may be safely placed in them, or the expectations which may be formed of them in certain circumstances, though it admits of personal observation, and the observation of others, is yet usually grounded on general

notoriety. Few men, comparatively, possess sufficient discrimination, or are sufficiently attentive to attain it for themselves. The greater part have not even learnt it from those who have attained it by their own observation ; but acquire what they possess of it, from the maxims which pass current in the world.

Our transactions with men are regulated much by their characters, (for which characters we have, often, no other ground than general opinion,) and much, perhaps most, by confidence. We purchase and consume articles of food and medicine, of which we are not sufficient judges to know, that they have not been adulterated by ingredients of a pernicious nature. Yet we know, that the articles with which they might be adulterated, are often so inferior in value, as to render adulteration profitable : that many tradesmen are not so delicate, as to refrain from adulteration, when it is profitable : that it is easily practised, and in each particular case, not likely to be detected. On the other hand, we trust, that though articles be often so adulterated, as to render them less salutary, or even injurious ; yet it is only in a slight degree : that scarcely any man would be so wicked, as to render them absolutely destructive : that the practice could not be often repeated, without being suspected, and per-



haps, detected : that the discovery would be attended with infamy and ruin. More than all this, we see others buy and consume these articles, without suffering material injury : nay, we ourselves have been accustomed so to do, from a period prior to that in which we were able to reason on the subject ; and yet, have felt no harm. We, therefore persist in doing it, without fearing any. Thus, in cases where our health, and even our lives are at stake, we act on a confidence, built on a sort of general experience, without any positive evidence, arising from testimony, or our own skill. It may be said, that we do this, because it is the less of two evils : for, no man could provide all his food, and prepare it himself ; or wait till he had ascertained that it was innocent before he would eat it ; if, therefore, he did not act on this confidence, he must starve. But, I answer, that we act thus in many cases not to preserve life, but merely to gratify our palate. And, in acting on this principle of confidence, we act reasonably. For, though instances of people's being injured, or even poisoned, occur ; yet, in comparison with the instances in which they thus trust to others with safety, they are as nothing. Hence, it appears, that the probability of our security in so doing, immensely exceeds the probability of injury. And, this is as good evidence as human life admits ;



absolute certainty being unattainable. On this principle, too, we trust our lives in the hands of physicians and apothecaries, and often without any direct evidence of their skill or integrity. So also we trust our fortunes in the hands of attornies; and a considerable part of our property in the hands of our servants. And, from this last circumstance, a confirmation, that this principle of confidence is regulated by experience, may be drawn. For, those articles of our property, which we know, either from our own observation, or the experience of others, that servants are likely to purloin, we secure from them; while we leave open to them those which we know, by experience, they are not likely to plunder. It is, also on the same principle, (though the remark may not be exactly in its place,) that they are to be vindicated from the charge of imprudence, who venture themselves at sea, or even on horseback, or in a carriage. Accidents in all these do occur; yet, they are not frequent enough to render the practice imprudent. If the instances in which they occurred, bore a large proportion to those in which they do not, it would be imprudent thus to expose ourselves to danger, without a strong necessity.

Of transient facts or events which we did not see, the proper evidence is testimony. If they be recent, personal witnesses of them may be produced; and then they may be established by *viva voce* testimony. But, if they be of a greater date, we must be content with the evidence of written testimony. In some cases, the testimony of a fact long past, may be confirmed by an observation of present circumstances. Thus, the deluge is confirmed by layers of sea-shells, which are found in high situations, at a distance from the sea, and deep in the earth. Volcanoes admit of confirmation from the lava and ashes. That certain large cities have existed and been destroyed, may be confirmed by the ruins which still remain. That camps have been pitched, and battles fought in particular places, may be confirmed by the appearance of the ground, and by the bones which are still found there. Some events admit of a confirmation by other writings, either public or private, besides those in which they are fully described, and from which our first information of them was obtained. The weight of this confirmation varies, according to the nature of these writings. Public records\* are of the

\* The principal facts relative to the Lord Jesus Christ are not only confirmed to us by uninspired history, as that of Josephus, &c. but by the very strong and unexceptionable evidence of public records; or, at least, by

highest authority. Deeds, bonds, receipts, are of undoubted weight, especially if the hand-writing of the parties, who executed or witnessed them, can be ascertained. But, then, these confirmations are rarely obtained ; and, therefore, such events are generally believed on no higher evidence than written

the testimonies of unexceptionable witnesses, that such records existed, and by their appeal to them, as documents well known to exist by those to whom the appeals were made ; and who, indeed, themselves were the depositaries of these records. Thus, Eusebius says, ‘ Our Saviour’s resurrection being much talked of throughout Palestine, Pilate informed the emperor of it, as likewise of his miracles, of which he had heard ; and that, being raised after he had been put to death, he was already believed by many to be a god.’ These despatches from the Procurators in the provinces, to the Emperor and Senate, were called their ‘ Acts,’ and those of Pilate were called ‘ Acta Pilati.’ Justin Martyr, therefore, in his first Apology for the Christians, which was presented to the emperor Antoninus Pius, and the senate of Rome, about A. D. 140, having mentioned the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and some of its circumstances, adds, ‘ And that these things were so done, you may know from the Acts made in the time of PONTIUS PILATE.’ In or near the year 200, Tertullian, in his Apology for Christianity, writes thus, ‘ Of all these things relating to Jesus Christ, PILATE himself, *in his conscience already a Christian*, SENT AN ACCOUNT to Tiberius, then emperor.’ He adds, still further, ‘ SEARCH YOUR OWN COMMENTARIES (or public records) you will there find, &c.’ It is incredible that such writers should have made such appeals, especially to the very persons in whose custody these monuments were, had not the monuments existed ; and equally so that they should exist, and the facts which they record never have occurred.—ED.

testimony. They are most frequently believed, on even lower evidence than this. For, written testimony is properly the evidence of a person, who himself observed the events, which he relates. But, such evidence can seldom be had. For, most events which have been long past, we must be content with a testimony, which has passed through several hands, before it reached us; and, very rarely can we ascertain the channel through which it came; for, we can seldom learn how the writer became acquainted with the events which he relates. And, even this degree of evidence is not possessed by most men, who yet believe the event; for, they have never read the works of the original writer, in which they are recorded; but, have obtained their information from a mere compilation.

When a recent event becomes the subject of examination in a court of judicature, it admits of the highest evidence which testimony can afford. For, the witnesses are then sworn to speak the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. They give their evidence in the face of the court. They are cross-examined by the counsel of the adverse party, who are qualified, by long practice, to detect deceptions, and discover the truth. The authenticity also of every paper brought in evidence, may be examined, and the force of

its proof fully established. When a fact of an older date becomes the subject of a law suit, the only evidence of which it can admit, are written memorials. For instance, when the title of an estate is called in question, deeds are capable of being produced in evidence. But, as the parties who executed them, and the witnesses to their execution have been long dead, the hand-writing of neither of them can be proved ; and therefore, the authenticity of the deed can be proved only by the appearance of its antiquity. Where the right is claimed by descent, it admits of being proved by parish registers, and sometimes by sepulchral monuments ; or, in some cases, by records in the herald's office ; or, perhaps, by family registers ; all of which are of great authority. Possession, added to either of these, is deemed satisfactory.

Recent public events, such as battles, sieges, &c. admit of the evidence of gazettes, and of general notoriety. These gazettes come to the public under the authority of Ministers of State ; and the credit due to them must be regulated by the judgment which is formed of the ability of the Ministers to know the fact, and their disposition to communicate it fairly. In respect to the former, their information is conveyed officially by those who are personally acquainted with



the facts, who are responsible for conveying the truth, and act under a conviction, that they will probably be detected, and punished, if they attempt to deceive. As to this point, therefore; there can be no reasonable doubt. In respect to the latter, the judgment should be formed by experience. If, on a fair investigation, it appears, that persons in their stations have been accustomed to give correct information to the public on such subjects, it is then entitled to credit, but not otherwise.

Of the evidence of which History admits.

Though many historic facts resemble those, which have been already mentioned, in the evidence of which they admit; yet the importance of history renders it worthy of a separate discussion, especially as its credibility has been disputed in almost unqualified terms.\* As far as any historian relates only

\* It is to be regretted, that the objections to the credibility of history, are not proposed with more caution and precision, than they usually are. From the unqualified terms in which they are often urged, all historic evidence seems in danger of being called in question. Of the extent of the mischief likely to result from such statements, their proposers are little aware. They do not consider, how great a part of the evidence of revealed religion, is of the nature of historic evidence; and, therefore, what would be its fate, if that species of evidence should be regarded as unworthy of credit? 'It is obvious,' says Bishop Butler, 'that Christianity, and the proof of it, are both historical.' Analogy, part ii. chap. 8.



such facts, as he himself observed, the evidence is of the same kind with written testimony ; only, as politics are more likely to warp the judgment, than almost any other subject, extraordinary caution may be necessary in giving credit to his relations. No historian, however, relates only such facts as he observed himself ; for, though some may say of their subject, ‘ *quorum magna pars fui*,’ they must mention many things which they neither did, nor saw, nor heard, but which they learned from others ; and indeed, such facts must generally, if not always, make up the greater part of their history. For these, their evidence is only a testimony ; that what they relate, is the judgment which they have formed from the use of the means which they possessed. Before we can tell, therefore, what degree of reliance is to be placed on their accounts, we must inquire what means of information they can possess. These will differ, according to the nature of the facts, and the circumstances of the historian. If the facts be of a public nature, their truth is generally capable of being ascertained with ease. By public facts, I mean such as Ministers of State either wish to be publicly known, or, at least, have no desire to conceal. For these, they have generally the evidence of proclamations, gazettes, or other public papers, or general notoriety. And, as the

publicity of such facts exposes every account of them to animadversion, and to correction, if they be at all erroneous, a just view of them may be easily attained. This is especially the case, if the historian resides in the country of which he writes; but it holds also to a considerable degree, when he does not; for so great an intercourse prevails between the different nations of Europe, especially in the times of peace, that, what is publicly known in one, soon becomes known in others. As to such public facts, therefore, historians are entitled to full credit, as far as relates to their means of information. The same publicity of the facts which they record, secures also their fidelity in relating them, as it exposes them to detection and shame, if they endeavour to deceive.

The only difficulty, therefore, relates to facts of a secret nature, such as the intrigues of courts, and of parties, debates, and resolutions of Privy Councils, motives for peace or war, secret alliances, and secret\* articles in treaties, corruption of public officers, or of popular leaders, &c. Of such facts, positive and direct evidence of testimony can very rarely be obtained, till a length of time has elapsed. The only information, therefore, which a contemporary historian can obtain of

\* These secret articles are often, perhaps generally, revealed by the circumstances which time discloses.

them, must be by remote testimony, report, or inference, drawn from such facts as are of a more public nature. It sometimes happens, that some of the parties concerned, have revealed them in confidence to their friends, and they again, still in confidence, to their friends; till at length they have become known to numbers. If the historian be of the higher ranks of life, he often becomes thus acquainted with these secret facts, either by remote testimony, or credible report; if not by a general notoriety within the higher circles. And, even an historian of an inferior rank, may become thus acquainted with them; for, in the present state of society, there is such an intercourse between the different ranks, that what is known in one, is soon known in all. When none of the parties have themselves betrayed the secret, information may have been obtained from secretaries or clerks, to whom much must necessarily be revealed to carry the plans into execution. And when the facts are likely to have great influence on the public funds, it is probable, that persons so much interested in knowing them, as stock-jobbers are, and so able to pay largely for information, will not fail of obtaining it. If, however, nothing transpires in either of these ways, there remains only inferences from more public facts. These, it must be admitted, do not afford such satis-

factory evidence, as the more direct sources of information ; but, it may be doubted, whether they do not furnish a better ground for our judgment, than politicians are willing to allow, at least when they are used against themselves, or their partizans. An attentive study of human nature ; an accurate observation of the conduct of men under certain circumstances, or influenced by certain views and motives ; a careful application of the knowledge, thus acquired, to particular cases as they occur ; together with a comparison of the different parts of the conduct of the men in question, to discover their general objects ; and a due consideration of their circumstances, will enable a man of judgment and penetration to form a tolerably just opinion of many of these secret facts. And, if the light, which subsequent facts throw upon the question, be properly applied, that judgment may be corrected or confirmed. The historian may also, in forming his judgment, avail himself of the assistance of politicians of the opposite party, whose abilities and skill in politics qualify them to draw their inferences more correctly than other men. Opinions, thus formed, will, however, be more true in *generals*, than in *particulars*. Thus, it may be safely inferred, that disgust has been taken, when the particular occasion may be unknown. We may conclude, that a certain resolution

has been adopted, when we know neither the reasons on which it was founded, nor the parties who supported or opposed it. Or, we may infer, that a particular man has been corrupted, when we are ignorant of the nature of the bribe, or the channel through which it was conveyed. They who endeavour to discredit all historical information, founded upon inference, have, probably, been indisposed to give it sufficient credit for its correctness in *generals*, on account of their disgust with its errors in particulars.\* After all, however, the assent which is due to those facts of history, which rest on such evidence, is lower than that, which should be given to such as are of a more public nature.

In respect to public facts, a contemporary historian has some advantages over one who records events, which happened some time ago. For, he is likely to have a clearer view of the connexion of causes and effects, and a more extensive knowledge of circumstances, as far as they are generally known. He has, also, better opportunities of gaining informa-

\* If a man wishes to obtain satisfactory ground for the decision of this question, let him collect the opinions which have, from time to time, been entertained of secret facts, and compare them with the information which has since been obtained of their respective subjects; as, for instance, the opinions which were entertained of Charles the Second, and his Ministers, should be compared with the information furnished by Sir John Dalrymple's Memoirs,



tion from others who may be better acquainted with any particular circumstances than he is. But, in respect to secret facts, he, who writes the history of a period some time past, has the advantage. For, the private letters and papers which are in the cabinets of princes, and in the hands of private families, are often, after a time, made public ; and, then the secret transactions and motives of politicians are ascertained. Thus, the papers contained in the Memoirs published by Sir J. Dalrymple, have thrown considerable light on the Histories of Charles the 2d. James the 2d. and William the 3d. Added to this, he is generally able to form a more correct judgment of the evidence on which the facts are founded, as well as of the nature of the facts themselves, than a man who writes while party prejudices still prevail.\*

The evidence of memoirs, written by persons who had a considerable share in the transactions which they relate, has been considered as superior to that of history ; and, no doubt it is so, in many respects ; but the preference which has been given to it, seems

\* Many persons may be able to estimate the magnitude of this advantage, by considering how different were their views of political transactions, when they took place ; from what they have since formed on an impartial review of them, or on reading the history of them.



too unqualified. Such a writer must, of course, be better acquainted with facts, circumstances, and characters, than a private historian can be. For, he must have better means of information of the proceedings of his own court, and of others, of the circumstances under which treaties were made, and of the secret articles annexed to them. He knows the conferences and councils of his own party, and the professed views of its members ; but, their real views he can know only by inference, as well as others. The views and councils of his opponents can be known to him only by testimony or inference. And, the testimony, which he can obtain of them, must be more or less suspicious, being that of spies and traitors to their party, persons who have often an interest in deceiving him. But, whatever advantages he may possess, great allowance ought to be made for the influence of prejudice in forming his judgments, and of partiality in relating them. For, as he had a large share in the transactions which he records, he must be considered as a man pleading his own cause. Hence, we should be as cautious in giving credit to his relations, as we are to persons in private life, who state to us their own case. And, indeed, if the conduct of politicians be fairly considered, it will, probably, appear that a more than ordinary caution is requisite in be-

lieving their statements. The evidence of a mere observer, an impartial person, as far as he possesses the means of information, is decidedly more safe, than of one concerned in the transactions, and interested in the judgment of mankind respecting them. This detracts more from the evidence of memoirs, than their advocates are willing to allow.

The history of periods, long past, admits of the evidence of contemporary historians,\* of public records, and public account-books, and occasionally of public monuments. Sometimes it admits of the evidence of historians, who wrote subsequent to the period described, and who had the use of materials† which have long since perished. Often, however, it admits of no other evidence than tradition; and that tradition so corrupted, by the desire which every nation has to aggrandize its origin, that the truth can scarcely be separated from the falsehood.

The evidence of Parliamentary Reports is also of the nature of written testimony; for they are composed by persons who heard the debates, and purport to be the substance of what they heard. As to the possibility of a man's giving, from memory, a tolerably accu-

\* See Note on p. 210.

† Thus of Eusebius and other ancient historians.

rate account of the debates which he has heard, it is a well-known fact. And, as to the probability of finding persons capable of doing it, no reasonable doubt can be entertained ; because many persons who have taken due pains to acquire an ability to do it, have succeeded. And, that the persons employed in reporting these debates are capable of doing it with tolerable accuracy, is highly probable ; since otherwise, they would not be continued in that employment. It is, indeed, possible, that some questions may be discussed in parliament, or some arguments urged, which they may not be able to comprehend ; and these they would be likely to misrepresent. But, this cannot happen often ; for the questions which are usually discussed there, and the arguments which are urged, are generally level to the capacity of a man of ordinary education ; or, indeed, they would not be suited to their purpose. Besides, by being the subjects of frequent conversation, they are altogether within their reach. The partiality of the reporters is, therefore, the principal circumstance, which can render their account suspicious. It is said, however, that this does not extend to misrepresentation, but only to the passing over the arguments of their political opponents too slightly, or, almost omitting their speeches ; while they give those of their own party at length. And this

view of the case is highly probable. Because, if palpable misrepresentations were made, as they would easily admit of correction, so, no doubt, they would be corrected, on account of the interest and power of those members, whose speeches were misrepresented, to vindicate their own characters. Besides, if misrepresentations were material and frequent, as they must be known, it is not to be conceived that the houses of parliament would suffer their debates to be published ; or that they would continue to be read with that attention and belief which they certainly obtain. It is remarkable too, that not only the public give credit to them, but even the principal speakers themselves consult the volumes of debates, when questions are coming on, which have been discussed before ; in order to see the arguments which were then urged by the respective speakers.\*

It should be observed, however, that he who wishes to form a just view of the debates from the newspapers, ought to read a paper

\* This question has lately been examined by Mr. Coxe, in his *Memoirs of Sir Robert Walpole*, under favourable circumstances, for an accurate decision. After a careful comparison of the debates, published during the period of which he writes, and the notes which had been written by Members of Parliament, together with other direct evidence on the question, he decides the point in favour of the authenticity of the debates.

of each party ; for then he would see in one, what was omitted, from party motives, by the other.

On what evidence can the authenticity of Books be established ? We very seldom attain direct and immediate testimony for this point ; *i. e.* we rarely hear the author say, that he wrote the book in question. If we are informed by a person who did hear him make such a declaration, we have then the testimony only at second hand. But, we have seldom even this evidence. Indeed, it rarely happens that we can trace it through two, three, or more steps, or even trace at all, the testimony to this fact ; and therefore, we usually believe it only on general notoriety, or even report. If the book bear on its title-page, the name of a living author, it may generally be believed to be his ; because, if any credit be obtained by it, it is improbable that the real author would give the merit of his performance to another ; and, if any disgrace be incurred by it, the reputed author would, probably, disavow it publicly ; and, perhaps, seek a legal remedy for the injury. Yet, if report is to be believed, books have been published, not only with fictitious names, but even with the names of living persons, who yet never wrote them, but sold to the booksellers the liberty of using their names.



But then, this practice is supposed to be confined to booksellers of a certain description; and therefore, it does not lessen the belief, that other booksellers do fairly give to the public the real names of the authors, whose books they publish. When a book is anonymous, the only ground, in general, for imputing it to a certain author, is report. If this report be credited by men reputed intelligent in things of this kind; if the reputed author be supposed capable of writing the book, (for which capacity there is often no other evidence than report,) if the report be contradicted by nobody, it may generally be safely believed. Sometimes, too, the style of the work, the method of treating the subject, and the sentiments enforced, will afford to some persons a probable ground of attributing the book to a certain author.\* But then this supposes them to be acquainted

\* It is upon evidence of this sort, in part, that, in these days, the genuineness of the Epistle to the Hebrews, as the work of Paul, and of the second and third of John, as his productions, is admitted. Neither of them bears the name of the writer. But the similarity of the style to that of other known writings of the same authors, the sentiments enforced, and (particularly with reference to the Epistle to the Hebrews) the method of treating the subject, so exactly accord both with other writings by the same hand, and with one deeply and accurately skilled in Levitical learning, as to forbid us to doubt the genuineness of the work. See especially Prof. Stuart's Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. —ED.



with other works of that author, and with his sentiments on that subject, or others nearly allied to it ; and moreover, that they possess considerable judgment in composition. Of course, this mode of ascertaining the author of a book, must be confined to few persons. In such cases, and many others of a similar kind, the report is some evidence on one side, which there is nothing on the other to counterbalance. Consequently, the preponderancy of the evidence is on the side of the report, and should produce some degree of assent.

The evidence for the authenticity of ancient books is rather different, and seems to be of the following kinds. First, that as far as we can learn the book is generally believed to have been written by the person whose name it bears ; secondly, that it is imputed to him in books, supposed to have been written at, or near the time, when the reputed author is said to have lived. It is observable, that this is supporting one presumption by another ; for, it may be asked, how do you know that the authors, whose testimony you cite, did live at that time, and write the books, which you impute to them ? But then, the coincidence of several presumptions, provided they be independent of each other, do afford very considerable probability. Thirdly, that as far as we can learn, it has never been disputed to be the work of the reputed author.

It is presumed here, that if it had been disputed, some record of that circumstance would have come down to us. Or, fourthly, that if it ever were disputed, its pretensions were examined, and yet it still continued to be attributed to the same author. This affords considerable confirmation, and the nearer the time of its examination was to its supposed publication, the greater is that confirmation.\* Fifthly, that the internal evidence of the book agrees with the most correct ideas, which we can form, of the reputed author, and of the time and place, when and where he is said to have written it ; at least, that no incongruity appears, either in style, or in any other circumstance. For, a consistency in all the various circumstances of style, opinions, manners, customs, forms of government, persons, geography, &c. afford a strong presumption, that a work is genuine. Because, it is highly improbable, that an author should have so thoroughly acquainted himself with all these circumstances of the time and place, in which he would have his spurious book be supposed to have been written, and keep them so constantly in his mind, as never to make any one mistake, capable of being detected by the learned ; and, at the same time, avoid the introduction of any circumstances of more modern times, with which

\* See Note on page 184.

his mind is so much more familiar. It may, indeed, be physically possible to do this ; but it is certainly highly improbable. And it should always be recollected, that our opinions of human affairs are to be regulated, not by physical possibilities, but by probabilities. Experience shows, that whatever abilities may be displayed in delusions, yet there is almost always some unguarded circumstance, which exposes them to detection. We find this in cases comparatively simple ; and therefore, may more reasonably expect it in so complicated a case, as that before us.

Of what evidence do Miracles admit ?

A miracle is an event, which happens contrary to the established course of nature. To an eye-witness, a miracle admits of the evidence of sense. The witness, however, must be supposed to be acquainted with the course of nature, so as to be able to judge, that the event in question is contrary thereto. In regard to the miracles recorded in scripture, this cannot be doubted. For no man of ordinary understanding, could be incapable of ascertaining, that the event was contrary to the established course of nature, when diseases were healed by a word, when sight was imparted to the blind, hearing to the deaf, the powers of speech to the dumb, merely at command, and without the use of any other

means ; especially when a corpse, which had begun to putrify, was restored to life by the speaking of a word.

To other men, miracles, like other events, admit of the evidence of testimony. As we cannot doubt the competency of the witnesses to ascertain the facts, their credibility is the only point to be considered ; and this must be determined upon the principles, on which the credibility of testimony, in general, depends. An objection, however, has been brought against the credibility of miracles, which merits particular notice. The objection in substance is, that a miracle being a violation of the laws of nature, which universal\* experience has proved to be invariable, its improbability cannot be surmounted by any human testimony whatever ; because it is more probable, that that testimony should be false, than that a constant law of nature should have been violated. The evidence which we have for the existence of a law of nature, and for the application of that law to particular cases, has been mentioned before. It was then observed, that as the constancy of these laws depends entirely on the will of God, so

\* Such an objection is a *petitio principii* ; it first assumes that the event *never has* occurred, and then argues from that assumption that it has not : for what is meant by its being contrary to *universal* experience, but that *no* person, at *any time* or *in any place* has experienced it ? And *this* is the point in dispute.—ED.

no argument from that constancy can be of any weight, when there is reason to conclude that it is his will, that they should be suspended or altered. This observation would, of course, be denied by a man who holds, that the course of nature is governed by a principle of necessity, independently of the will, or agency of God. But, he who holds that God governs the world, will admit the observation. With him, therefore, the only question would be, whether any occasion may arise, which, it may reasonably be concluded, would induce God to alter or suspend any of the constant operations of nature. And, if it can be shown that such occasions have arisen, all the objections from the most constant course of nature, would be of no real weight; their sound would then be more formidable than their meaning. This latter question must be determined by arguments of a different kind from the constant experience of natural things. It should then be inquired, whether it can be presumed, that any occasion should occur, in which it may be important that God should reveal his will to men, to correct their mistakes, to reform their vices, or to give them any new instruction. The view, which will be entertained of the existence of such an occasion, and of its importance, will depend on the judgment which has been formed of the moral state of mankind,



and of the happiness or misery which may await men in the next world. If it be admitted, that such occasions may occur, it should then be inquired, how such a revelation can be made, so as to excite the attention of men, and warrant their reception of it as from God. Now, in what other way, discoverable by us, can this be done, than by accompanying it with miracles? Hence, miracles may be expected to attend a divine revelation. Consequently, they are not events so improbable, as to surmount the evidence of testimony, if that testimony be in itself unexceptionable.

On a review of this chapter, it will probably appear surprising, on how small evidence most subjects are believed. This is mentioned, not to excite or encourage scepticism, nor should it have that effect. For, if experience shows, that the instances in which we are deceived by believing on this evidence, small as it may be, bear an inconsiderable proportion to those in which we decide rightly by it, it has a just claim on our assent. For, experience must be the only criterion of the safety or danger of the practice. This review will, also, show the inconsistency of refusing to believe certain things, which, perhaps, interest, or a regard to party, may incline us to reject, because stronger evidence is not brought for them, than, in the nature



of the thing, they admit ; while we are in the constant practice of believing so many other things, and those often of very great importance, on such slight evidence. We ought to impress it on our minds, that, though we do rightly in requiring the strongest evidence which the subject can afford ; yet, we ought always to be satisfied with the strongest of which, under all its circumstances, it admits.

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## CONCLUSION.

A FEW remarks shall conclude this tract.

1. From the whole of this work it will appear, that experience is the great test of probability, and the grand principle on which all moral reasoning must proceed, either in the attainment of knowledge, or in the regulation of practice. But then, it should be observed, that experience furnishes only the materials of knowledge ; and, that great skill is necessary to make a proper use of them. The object of this tract is to facilitate the acquirement of that skill, by showing how our observations are to be conducted in attaining a knowledge of things ; and, how experience

is to be employed in determining the probability of events, and in regulating our credit in the testimony and observations of others.

2. As experience is the great foundation of moral evidence, a skilful use of moral reasoning cannot be acquired, till a later period of life than such a use of demonstration ; because, a considerable time must have elapsed, before we are furnished with proper materials to form our judgments. Hence arises the necessity of submitting to the judgment of those of our elders, who have no interest but in our welfare. And, hence, young men, even of great abilities, both natural and acquired, who reject the counsel of their seniors, often make such serious mistakes, as lay the foundation of bitter, but unavailing repentance. An indisposition to avail ourselves of the experience of others is, probably, one of the principal causes of the miseries of human life.

3. It should be remembered, that errors in judgment on practical questions, are not innocent, unless they are inevitable. For, we have received our talents from our Creator for the direction of our conduct, and are responsible to him for a fair use of them. But, we do not use them fairly, when we assume the liberty of forming our judgments according to our inclinations, or present interests ; when we neglect or pervert those rules for distinguishing truth from error, which are

established on the general experience of mankind ; or, when we implicitly adopt the opinions, or follow the advice of those, who are as uninformed as we are, or are interested to deceive us. We can never, indeed, be said to use them fairly, unless we improve the opportunities which we enjoy, to prepare our minds for a just decision of practical questions ; and, when we proceed to decide them, apply fairly and steadily those principles of reasoning, which alone can conduct us to a right conclusion.

4. Lastly, the soundest principles of morality are of little use, without a just application of them ; and to apply them justly, it is necessary to form an accurate view of facts and circumstances. Such a view we cannot form without a competent knowledge, and a fair application of the principles of moral evidence. But, if a man be ignorant of these principles, or, if knowing them, he neglect or pervert them, so as to give credit to mere assertions, or ex parte evidence on one side, while he withholds his assent from the strongest evidence, which the nature of the subject admits, on the other ; if, like a disputant for victory, and not an inquirer after truth, he allow himself to dispute, or explain away, maxims founded on general observation, or notorious truths, merely on account of the difficulty which there must always be of collecting

compulsive proof of them, the best moral principles will not preserve him from a conduct injurious to society, and the more injurious, in proportion to the weight of his character.

## APPENDIX.

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### ON DISPUTING FOR VICTORY, AND NOT FOR TRUTH.

WHENEVER a man engages in a debate, without proposing to himself the establishment of some point, which he really believes to be true ; or, whenever he attempts to prove that some truth is an error, or some error is true, he is disputing for victory and not for truth. Sometimes, men contend in order to obtain the reputation of able disputants. On other occasions, victory is only a means, but the support or defence of a party\* is the ultimate end proposed. In both cases, truth is equally disregarded, and the powers of reason equally perverted. The methods, also which are used in both, are nearly the same. A few of the most common of these methods, it may be useful to enumerate. All of them it would be scarcely possible to mention ; because,

\* This is most likely to happen, when parties run high ; and therefore, it often happens on the commencement of a war. Hence, Dr. Johnson says, ' Among the calamities of war, may be justly numbered the diminution of the love of truth, by the falsehoods which interest dictates, and credulity encourages.' Idler, vol. i. page 169.

every sophism, which is capable of being employed on the subject in question, is occasionally resorted to by these disputants. But, a brief description of a few may be useful, both to show more clearly the nature of the practice, and to put the reader upon his guard against its delusions.

Disputants for victory, and not for truth, often deny such positions of their opponent, as though true, do not admit of specific proof. Of this kind are those, which are founded on observation or experience, or general notoriety. They dispute facts, which they do not disbelieve, and take the chance of their opponent's not being furnished with positive proof of them. They explain away those maxims, which are founded on the general experience of mankind, and are delivered in proverbial expressions. They demand a species,\* or degree of proof, of which the subject does not admit. Thus, on practical questions, they dispute conclusions proved by strong probable arguments, and withhold their assent, because they cannot be demonstrated. On the other hand, they require possibilities to be admitted by their opponent, in opposition to strong probabilities. They demand

\* Thus, mathematical evidence is demanded on moral subjects ; and a position required to be shown *impossible to be false*, which, in its nature, only admits of being shown true to a *moral* certainty.—ED.



the admission of mere *ex parte* evidence, and that, often of a very suspicious kind, in their favour ; while they reject legitimate evidence on the subject against them. They lay hold of an occasional word, dropped by their opponent, either to divert the discussion from the subject in question, or to give a false sense to an argument. They cite their opponent's words unfairly, or give them a different meaning from what he intended by them. They endeavour to evade the question, by substituting some other question instead of it. They avail themselves of a mistake in some of the circumstances of a fact, to make the whole of it appear false, though the substance of the statement be true. They endeavour to confound the principles, either of evidence, or of morality, on which the decision of the question must depend. In a word, they show, that they consider themselves entitled to take every advantage, however unfair, to establish their cause. Such disputants must, of course, have a great advantage over a fair and honest reasoner, whose only object is to discover and establish the truth. For he cannot allow himself to take any unfair advantage, or to use any methods, which would be likely to mislead. It would be inconsistent with the end, which he proposes to himself, to urge any argument or objection, which he does not believe to be well founded ; or to give it

greater weight than in his judgment, it really deserves. He would rather, even supply any defect which he might perceive in his opponent's statement of facts or arguments, whereby they had less force than they ought to have, that he might contribute all in his power to a right decision of the question. Which of these characters is the more honourable and useful, cannot be doubted. But it is not sufficient to say, that disputing for victory is not so honourable or useful, as fairly inquiring after truth. It may further be shown, that the practice is immoral.

The powers of reason and speech, are given to men for the attainment and communication of truth; and are perverted when they are used to deceive. This is acknowledged in the case of lying; and, there seems no reason why it should not be acknowledged in this case also. For, the essence of a lie is the intention to deceive. The means employed are immaterial, whether they be words, or signs, or arguments. Now, in this case, there is an intention to deceive. For, the disputant does intend to make it believed, that some error is a truth, or some truth an error; or, that conclusive arguments are not conclusive, or vice versa: moreover, he endeavours to persuade his hearers, that he believes them so to be. And, if he be successful in his endeavours, they are really deceiv-

ed, no less than if they believed any other falsehood.

When the defence of a party is the ultimate object, he who adopts this practice, does actually propose to himself deception, as a means of accomplishing his end. Here, therefore, the intention to deceive is manifest. Upon what principles, then, this practice can be justified, it is difficult to conceive. For, however important the interests and reputation of any man's party may be in his esteem, he cannot be justifiable in promoting them by means of deception ; unless it can be proved, that the end will sanction the means ; or, that it is lawful to do evil, that good may come. But, when victory, or the reputation of being an able disputant, is the ultimate object, it may be said, perhaps, that the disputant has no real wish to impress on the mind of his opponent, or others, a belief of false arguments, or a false conclusion ; but only to display superior talents of reasoning for his credit or amusement. But, I answer, that though reputation or entertainment be his ultimate end, yet, in order to accomplish it, he does represent falsehood as truth, or truth as falsehood ; and endeavour to make them believed so to be, at least, for the time ; otherwise, he could not succeed. But, no man can have a right to promote his reputation or his amusement, by such means ; any

more than he can have a right to tell lies for a similar purpose. Our right to amuse ourselves, or to display our talents, can extend only to things which are in themselves innocent; which deception cannot be. To gratify ourselves in this way, then, must be wrong. If the disputant were always careful to correct the delusions, before he left the company, it may be questioned whether his conduct would even then be innocent. It would be like indulging oneself in telling marvellous stories, and, after having amused oneself in such a license for a considerable time, telling the company, that they were falsehoods. Would this practice be deemed justifiable? But, the truth is, that these disputants are rarely, if ever, careful thus to undo the mischief which they have done. On the contrary, they generally leave the false impressions which they have made, in full force on the minds of their hearers.

We are told in scripture, that ‘for every idle word we must give an account in the day of judgment.’ And surely words employed to deceive, must be idle words, in a very bad sense.

Added to all this, the consequences of the practice of thus disputing for victory, and not for truth, are injurious. They are so to the disputant himself. For such a conduct tends to weaken the influence of sound arguments

upon his judgment, and to generate scepticism. As the accustoming ourselves to examine carefully the weight of arguments, and to allow them due influence on our minds, tends to strengthen our judgment; so, the using ourselves to start objections against arguments, instead of soberly estimating their force, must promote scepticism; for, our minds are subject to the influence of habits, as well as our bodies. Experience, also, shows that persons, who addict themselves to this practice, do often turn out sceptics.

If a man propose the defence of a party by these means, he hereby fortifies himself in the wrong; for, if his party were right, they would not need such a defence. It can hardly be supposed, that he can have the same sense of doing wrong, in any particular thing, which he has been accustomed to defend victoriously, as he would have, if he had been usually defeated in his attempts to maintain it. Certainly, the law of reputation cannot operate upon him in the one case, as it would in the other. He also precludes himself from the advantage which he might enjoy for the detection of his errors, not only on the point in question, but in others connected with it. For, his friends, were they not silenced by his sophistries, might point out to him his mistakes, and the erroneous principles on which they are founded; both of which, as

observers, they are more likely to discover than he.

To the hearers, also, the practice is injurious. If they do not detect his fallacies, they are really deceived ; and the mischievous consequences of this deception will be in proportion to the importance of the subject. If they perceive that, though victory is obtained, yet it is not on the side of truth, they are led to regard the art of reasoning, like the art of fencing ; that is, as entirely dependent on the skill of the disputant ; but, as having no natural tendency to the discovery of truth. For, they suppose, that, if a more skilful disputant were to take the opposite side of the question, he would be able to confute all the former arguments, and to establish an opposite conclusion. Thus, the faculty which God bestowed upon man to discover truth, and to direct his conduct, is brought into disrepute ; and its influence on mankind is weakened, if not destroyed. Can it be justifiable, then, to render useless, or even to impair the use of so important a faculty, by amusing ourselves, or promoting the interests of a party.

Besides, as, in this practice, some false rule of reasoning must always be laid down, either formally, or by implication ; or some just rule be rejected or perverted, it must always tend to pervert men's principles of



reasoning, and to confound those rules by which truth is to be distinguished from error. For instance, should a man maintain that probabilities ought not to influence our judgment, or our conduct ; but, that we have a right to demand certainty, before we act or believe, it is evident, that he would be culpable. For, he would be endeavouring to propagate a doctrine, which would make men infidels in religion, and would confound the principles on which they must act in common life. Now, where is the great difference, whether he maintains this doctrine formally, in words ; or, whether he assumes it as a principle, on which he grounds his arguments, and thus enforces it by his own example ?

If he adopt this practice to support a party, he is endeavouring to prevail on others, to support what is wrong. For, as was observed before, if his party were right, they could not need such a defence. This he cannot do innocently ; unless it can be proved that guilt and innocence have no relation to party matters.

Another evil, attending this practice of disputing for victory and not for truth, is its tendency to excite anger. A man can bear, much more patiently, to be shown that he is wrong, if he be really so ; than to have the victory wrested out of his hands by a sophism, or a perversion of the rules of evidence,

Nothing, indeed, is more likely to irritate and disgust, than a conduct so unfair. Hence, also, disputation itself, is brought into disrepute, and men account debating an evil, because they observe, that it generally ends in a quarrel. But, this it would rarely do, if this unfair way of reasoning were laid aside.

What has been said, has been urged with a view to show the immorality of this practice ; but its *folly*, also, may be shown. And, as it is feared, that this consideration will weigh more with many, than its immorality, it is necessary to add a few words on this topic.

If the reputation of being an able disputant be his object, it may be questioned, whether it is not in general defeated. For, with men, at least of sound judgment, the notion of an able disputant includes that of a fair reasoner ; but, the notion of a disputant for victory, resembles that of a person who cheats at play, and is, in consequence, despised. If the reputation of a party be his object, it is generally frustrated ; because, the delusion will rarely be of long continuance, but will most frequently be detected by reflection, and by subsequent information ; and, when it is detected, it excites a presumption, that his party is in the wrong.

END.













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